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TEMPTATIONS
A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES

TEMPTATIONS

A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES

BY

DAVID PINSKI

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM

THE YIDDISH BY

DR. ISAAC GOLDBERG



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INTRODUCTION

THE same traits that distinguish David Pinski as a playwright characterise him also as a writer of short fiction. The noted Yiddish author is concerned chiefly with the probing of the human soul,—not that intangible and inconsequential theme of so many vapourings, dubbed mystic and symbolistic by the literary labellers,—but the hidden mainspring that initiates, and often guides, our actions. Pinski seeks to penetrate into the secret of human motive. It is not enough for him to depict the deed; he would plumb, if possible, the genetic impulse. That is why, if he must be classified, one places him among the psychological realists. He is at his best faithful to both the inner and the outer life.

Thus we find, in his numerous stories and plays, very little of the conventional heroism

and villainism with which most authors are concerned, and very much of the deeply human at which the majority of authors shake their heads. This is not to say that Pinski's work lacks heroic figures; on the contrary, in a measure it constitutes a series of noble and ennobling portraits, representing men and women who meet life face to face and are scorched by its flames. So, too, there are less inspiring personages who compromise with life and their better selves. And in the background lurks our common humanity, faintly quick with the potentialities of ignominy or greatness.

Despite his growing fame as one of the most significant dramatists now active, Pinski began his career as a writer of short stories. He has been recognised as the first Yiddish author to give artistic treatment to the Yiddish proletariat, and no small part of his life has been sacrificed to the cause of the oppressed and the disinherited. His earlier works, both in fiction and in the drama, were devoted to the depiction of life among the lowly, and it is characteristic

of the man that he does not allow his personal views to mar his artistic product.

It may be said that three chief periods have thus far appeared in the labours of the Yiddish author. First there is his proletarian "manner" in which the life, problems and aspirations of the Jewish workingman are portrayed in such masterly dramas as "Isaac Sheftel" (written at the age of twenty-seven) and such incisive commentaries as the best of the early tales, "Drabkin." Then there is the genre of the biblical reconstruction, in which ancient themes are utilised for the purpose of producing thoroughly contemporary works of art. Among his plays "The Dumb Messiah" and "Mary Magdalen" represent this phase of his skill, while among the stories, "Zerubbabel" and "Beruriah" would come under this category.

There is also the treatment of sex problems, as evidenced by such plays as "Jacob the Blacksmith" and "Gabri and the Women," and tales like "The Awakening" and "The Black Cat."

I must confess that I am not greatly concerned with the periods and "manners" of authors; classification has little to do with genuine literary appreciation. This is all the more true in a case like Pinski's, since the various phases of his work follow no chronological order, and often appear side by side, as it were, in the same work. Take for instance the first tale in this book, "Beruriah," which I consider one of the greatest short stories ever written, insofar as the wide reading of a single person in some half dozen or more languages can substantiate such a statement. Who shall say that the tale is mere reconstruction or elaboration of a Talmudic legend, or a problem in love, or a psychological study, or even a symbolic story? It is all of these, and something more. Who shall say that "Drabkin" is merely a proletarian narrative? To be sure, the background is furnished by the humble Jewish operatives, but is the tale itself any the less universal on that account? Is it any the less a problem in love? Is it any the less a satire upon human foibles, with the same essen-

tial theme as Pinski's remarkable work of genius, "The Treasure,"—one of the outstanding dramas of the century?

The truth is that Pinski harmonises and renders universal almost everything he touches. From an insignificant three or four line suggestion in the Talmud he elaborates a "Beruriah," producing one of the most striking female portraits that has come from an author peculiarly rich in well-drawn women. Out of various strands from Jewish history he weaves a "Zerubbabel," which flames with a Jewish patriotism particularly contemporary in application. Nor is this intense devotion any more exclusively Jewish than the crumbling of world-philosophies depicted in the epic play, "The Last Jew."

This human and universal touch is rendered all the more evident by the author's attitude, both in life and in the stories that are the product of his actual experience, toward the oppressed and the disinherited whose champion he is. With him the independence of the writer is

almost a religion; so much so that he is just as ready to voice fearlessly the faults of his own people as he is to glorify their historic and racial virtues. He reveals them to themselves, and is as little compromising with them as with any other. If he knows their nobility, he knows, too, their pettiness; he sees them in their climb up Mount Sinai to talk with the Lord, and in their grovelling over the heaps of mire called money-making.

Yet it is no part of his art or his purpose to sit in judgment. Indeed, one of the noblest notes arising from the author's work as a whole is the spirit of "Judge not." This human note rings from "Mary Magdalene" (an entirely original treatment of the fecund theme, superior, in my opinion, to both Paul Heyse's and Maurice Maeterlinck's plays upon the same subject) as from the excellent tales "The Temptation of Rabbi Akiba" and "High Priest Johanan." He who beholds in such stories as these only a biblical or religious strain, misses more than half of their beauty. Rabbi Akiba

and High Priest Johanan are not spirits of an ancient age, individuals of a departed civilisation. Far from it. They are you and I. "Beruriah" is by no means the virtuous wife of an overwrought Rabbi. She is an eternal type; she can be found in the Talmud, in the Icelandic sagas, in a play by Ibsen, in a novel by Hardy; she is Antigone, she is Candida; she is the soul of woman clothed in tragic beauty.

Pinski's tales, then, of which the following comprise the first series, demand universal appreciation but little less than his dramas. Theirs is that rare beauty which is an indissoluble union of manner and matter. In the original, they represent the most melodious Yiddish that has been written,—a powerful refutation of the unthinking scorn of those who refer to the tongue as a jargon. They are for men and women who read with the mind as well as the eye.

ISAAC GOLDBERG.

Roxbury, Mass.

March, 1919.

BERURIAH

DEDICATED

**TO THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF
MY BELOVED LITTLE SON**

G A B R I

(Born March 11, 1909; Died August 14, 1916)

This tale, which I began forty-two hours before his death, in the happy certainty that his slight illness would quickly pass, and without the slightest presentiment that I and his wonderful mother would soon have to seek consolation in it.

THE AUTHOR

BERURIAH

I

BLESSED with all the virtues was Beruriah, wife of the noted Master, Rabbi Mayer. It was at the time that God's heart was filled with pity for the Jewish people, which had just lost its independence and its freedom, and from under His heavenly throne He summoned her soul, and sent her down to earth. "Go, and rejoice the hearts of the wretched and exiled. Go, and bring gladness to the sad and mournful. Let him that beholds you know that life is worth the living, and understand that he has an Almighty Lord who can create glory, and let him praise and bless my Name."

And therefore was she called Beruriah,—the chosen of God. The Romans, however, called her Valeria,—the blessed one.

So beautiful she was, that at the most glorious sunset, the eyes of the worshipful onlookers wandered from the sun to her and from her to the sun, and none could be sure which was the greater beauty or which the greater miracle. But at the consecration of the moon she dare not show herself upon the street, lest the moon take flight before the greater beauty, and pious Jews be helpless quite to bless it. Whenever she walked along the way, all passers-by stood still, lest they fall into a ditch at their feet or stumble across a rock in their path, for all eyes were turned only upon her. And those who toiled heavily were wont to say, when they had beheld her, "The sight was even as balm to our weary limbs. Now will our labours once again seem light." And those who sat within doors also said, "Was not our house just radiant with a loving glow? Beruriah must have passed beneath our window." And then the sages introduced a new blessing, with which Jews should hymn the praises of the Lord for having shared His beauty with a mortal.

Wise was she, too; so that the old men of her time queried, "Shall we not don women's garb and surrender our men's habits to her? For before her we are like old women in whom the little sense they had has long evaporated, while she possesses the wisdom of all our years added together." And when a husband scolded his wife, saying that women had much hair but little brains, the wife would retort: "And what of Beruriah?" Then the husband would see that he had been hasty, and that his own wife was more clever than he, since she had so cunningly reminded him of Beruriah. Whereupon the sages introduced a new blessing, with which Jews should chant the praises of the Lord for having shared His wisdom with a mortal.

But Beruriah was deeply learned, too. In the written lore of the Holy Law she was as sure as if she trod upon a beaten path, and the oral commentaries reposed within her as securely as sacred books within their closet. Great keenness of intellect in her was merged

with clear simplicity, and the Torah is a field that may be worked with these tools alone. Many a tangle did Beruriah unravel, and many an obscure spot did she illuminate. Her word and her interpretations were esteemed as highly as those of her own husband, the renowned Talmudist Rabbi Mayer. But of this same Rabbi Mayer, who was the greatest of his epoch, and who was so subtle that he could demonstrate the purity of a reptile in one hundred and fifty different ways, it was said: "Small wonder that he knows so much and that he is so acute. For Beruriah is his wife!"

Rabbi Mayer, however, heeded the words but little, and felt no affront, for he was very proud of her and loved her boundlessly. And every day he would utter in his prayers, "A wondrous jewel hast Thou created, and of all Thy servants, Thou hast chosen me to be illuminated by its brilliancy. How shall I thank Thee, God?"

II

And Rabbi Mayer's students said, "Beruriah has been blessed with all the virtues, and she is to Rabbi Mayer a wondrous jewel with which God has chosen to glorify our master; yet is not her heart but the weak heart of a woman? And even as the flashes of the jewel, do not human passions play and contend within her? Who can assure us that her ears are sealed against the seductive speeches that fall upon her like glowing sparks and melt her heart like wax? Blessed, too, with all the virtues was Mother Eve, of whom all later generations of women are but a reflection, and yet her ears were open to the serpent. And where Eve succumbed, surely Beruriah will not be able to resist."

Thus spoke Rabbi Mayer's pupils among themselves, until at last it came to the ears of the great Teacher. At first he was deeply incensed and his anger boiled like the seething waters of a fiery cauldron. He wished to con-

front his disciples in all his fury and drive them forth. How dare they question her virtue and her purity,—her will of steel against all tempting tongues! Was not Beruriah a holiday-child of God's, and did not he who insulted her desecrate the holy day,—was he not a sinner unworthy of sitting before Rabbi Mayer, hearing him expound the Torah?

But he who could demonstrate the purity of a reptile in one hundred and fifty different ways, soon changed his course of thought. Were he to drive forth his disciples for the doubt they had uttered regarding Beruriah, they would take leave and declare, "Had we been wrong in our doubts Rabbi Mayer would have laughed us to scorn, and would soon have forgotten our words. But because they are well-founded he flew at once into a rage and cast us forth from him."

His seething anger became now an immense scorn, but his sharp mind kept thinking further: Wicked is man's tongue and low the doubts of his heart. To prove the purity of a reptile one

must be a Rabbi Mayer, but to render a Beruriah impure, one need be merely a reptile. They would not cease talking until the day on which she died, and when her glorious soul would depart from her glorious body, unsullied and pure of sin, they would say, "She died pure, because no serpent tested her,—because the Lord never tried her with temptations." And they would speak even more: "God tries the strong alone; and knowing how weak was Beruriah's heart against the tempter, He did not try her and shielded her from seduction."

At this thought an oppressive weakness overpowered his entire body, and his high forehead was bedewed with sweat. What was he to do to keep the venomous tongues from stinging Beruriah? How was he to act so that every thought of her should be as pure as her own heart?

His deep wisdom pondered, and soon whispered a reply: "Let them test her!"

A shudder rippled through him, and it was as if he must feel shame before the four walls

in whose shelter he had dared to think such thoughts. Yet he could not free himself from that one suggestion; it was the one way out. Through such a test of Beruriah all evil mouths would be stopped forever, and all would see that his wife Beruriah had a heart as pure as her spirit,—that her virtue was as great as her beauty,—that her fidelity to him was as great as her wisdom. And then indeed would they behold how great was God's grace to their generation, in which Beruriah lived,—and how great was he himself in the eyes of the Lord that he should have been given her for a wife.

And Rabbi Mayer pondered for one day, and two, and three. He lost all desire for food, and sleep forsook him. Ideas multiplied within him with the rapidity of lightning; one thought generated another, supported it, refuted it. Mountains and mountains of thoughts,—deep, keen, far-reaching. And among them were thoughts that shamed him in his own eyes,—that stirred his unrest and kindled a wrath against his very self. How did they ever come

to him? These doubts,—how could they ever have entered his soul? How could he,—he, of all men, who knew her heart so well and to whom her thoughts were as an open book? Had she not shown enough how pious and strong she was, at the death of her two children? Had not all the world then seen that his Beruriah was unparalleled?

But the pious Master who had compared the power of Satan with the power of the Lord, and had issued a thousand admonitions against the Evil One, tremblingly sought protection for him and his one fear of the Evil Spirit. And in shame, with quivering lips, he whispered, "Forgive me, Beruriah, my holy one. But let them now subject you to the test!"

III

Whereupon Rabbi Mayer assembled all his students, and spoke to them.

"Your words about my wife Beruriah have reached me, and your doubts concerning her have come to my ears. When one feels doubt

about his companion groundlessly, what is that companion to do? Shall he not come and say, 'What is the ground for your suspicion, and how have I called forth your misgivings?' And shall he not say, 'You are a wicked comrade, else should you have raised no doubts against me, since there is no foundation for them.' Shall I not tell you all that you are evil minds, unworthy of sitting before me, since your own thoughts are base and you yourselves are a toy in the hands of seduction? Wherefore you doubt, too, the purity of my wife Beruriah? Would I not be right to dismiss you all from me, damming the stream of my learning against you?"

A terror descended upon the disciples and they were tossed in deep disquietude. Those among them who, more than the others, had uttered the doubts and spread them, sat rooted, with downcast eyes, abashed and crestfallen. But those who had simply listened to the doubts, without repeating them, looked about in fear and consternation, as if seeking the guilty. And

one arose, saying, "Rabbi, surely you will not punish those who listened, even as those who uttered?" •

Rabbi Mayer replied, "The same penalty for those who listened as for those who spoke. For not alone is the mouse the thief, but the hole also."

Whereupon the disciples began to murmur, softly and sheepishly, "But we doubt no longer."

Rabbi Mayer laughed.

"Wise pupils have I in you, and to think that *you* will spread the Law through Israel! Such as *you* will prove a reptile pure in only one way: when it will profit you."

The disciples were now dejected more than ever. And Rabbi Mayer spoke again to them, as was his practice, through a parable.

"A fox met a hen, and said to her, 'I have heard that you doubt my being the most virtuous of creatures. For that I will straightway devour you.' The hen was seized with fear and cried, entreatingly, 'I do not doubt it, and

if I ever did, I will never doubt it again.' And the fox, who was in a pleasant humour because his stomach was full, spoke again to her: 'This time I let you free. But remember, should you ever in future express the slightest doubt, you will be as good as dead.' Whereupon the hen took oath that never should she express the slightest doubt. But when the fox had released her and gone on his way, she snuggled her head in between her wings and furtively thought to herself that there was none so wicked as the fox."

And now Rabbi Mayer raised his voice and said, "No, not with intimidation would I banish the doubts you feel concerning my wife Beruriah. For after all, you will take refuge deep in your hearts, and admonish your thoughts never to dare rise to your lips. You will tell yourselves that you are right, but that because you did not wish to lose me, you pretended to be convinced. I wish, however, that all doubts truly cease,—that they be driven from your hearts and that your souls be cleansed of them."

The disciples sat still, as if considering how this might come to pass, and one among them who was not over careful, blurted out, "If you will cease to doubt, so will we, too."

At first Rabbi Mayer's face grew fiery red, but he uttered not a word, as if to refrain from speaking in great anger. Then his countenance turned ghastly pale, sunken and wan from surging, volcanic wrath. Then he spoke:

"Woe unto him whose thoughts are those of a fool, but greater woe still if he master not his lips. Did you then doubt, at first, because I doubted? Who of you will dare to rise and say that Rabbi Mayer doubted his wife Beruriah? But those doubts which you could not conceal within yourselves, and had to drool out and pour into others' ears, even as venomous snakes, have become like the source of a plague, spreading pestilence to right and to left, near and afar. Even I have caught the contagion of your doubt, and, as you speak, so speak I now myself. 'Perhaps Beruriah is true to me because no tempter ever sought her ear.'"

Those of the disciples who had been first to sow the seed of doubt wished to lift their heads in triumph, but they refrained, content to smile within their hearts, and barely able to keep the smile from prancing to their lips. But the wise Rabbi Mayer had noticed the spark of triumph that had flashed in their eyes, and thundered forth in tones that scattered terror:

"Never have I entertained doubt of my wife Beruriah. Nor has the slightest suspicion assailed me as to the purity of her heart. But your evil venom has corroded my being, and the stench of your words has grown foul thoughts within me. Now I tell myself, 'The apple is wondrous fair, but who can say what passes in its heart?' This have you wrought with the poison of your doubts: that Rabbi Mayer should feel uncertainty as to the virtue of Beruriah, his wife. Shall I not drive you from me with rods and curses? But no.* I have determined otherwise. What does one do to learn whether the beautiful apple be sound at the core? He cuts it open. I, too, will cut

open, will peer into, Beruriah's heart; I will test her soul. And hear, now, what I have resolved upon: For thirty days I will not appear to her in Tiberias,—and thirty days, I believe, will be enough to test the power of a woman's virtue, when her husband is absent from her. And you—choose from among you one who shall take it upon himself to be her tempter—.”

IV

More than one heart quaked as Rabbi Mayer uttered these words. The possible companionship with the wonderful Beruriah coursed like a hot stream from head to foot in many a student. But strongest of all beat the heart of handsome Simeon, son of Rabbi Ismael, and he had to close his eyes because of the flood of passion that inundated him.

Most handsome of all the disciples was Simeon, son of Rabbi Ismael. Once a Roman matron had beheld him, and it seemed to her as if Adonis, the Greek god of strength and youth

and beauty, had turned Jew and given himself up to the study of the fathomless Torah. And she called him "the Adonis who^o turned Jew." He was tall, slender and agile; the hair of his head and of his small beard was reddish; his eyes were of a colour that changed with the time of day and the temper of his moods, and none could withstand his glance. Out of piety he would shut his eyes on passing a woman, lest unholy thoughts be born in a Jewish daughter's bosom. But once, on passing Beruriah, he had not shut his eyes, and instead of igniting another, he was himself set on fire, and on his eyes was impressed her image, inextinguishably, even as a seal impresses the burning wax. From that time he saw only her before him; she was his dream by night, his thought by day, nor did his holy studies avail him aught. His striking masculine beauty had found its mate in Beruriah, and he hungered after her as for something that had always belonged to him,—something that ever had been destined for him. He had been pious all his years, had known most ardent pray-

ers and tormenting fasts, bodily tortures and cleansing of the soul. But now his prayers no longer were horror of sin, but complaints and grievances. It was as though the Lord withheld what was justly Simeon's; as if God had taken away his rightful property, and his alone. And why had God placed Beruriah in his path? Why had the Lord not closed his eyes at their meeting? And in his restless, often feverish thoughts he showed God how he, Simeon, might come to her who was destined to be his. Rabbi Mayer might die, and he would inherit Beruriah; or if God did not wish the death of the holy man, Beruriah could forsake her learned husband,—divorce him and fly to the arms of her twin in beauty. Could not almighty God bring this to pass?

And now that Rabbi Mayer had announced his resolution, it was as if God had answered Simeon's prayers, knowing that he would be the one to execute the purpose of the Rabbi, which was in reality the hidden purpose of the Almighty. And Rabbi Mayer, after uttering

his plan, turned his glance to Simeon, son of Rabbi Ismael, as if Simeon were he upon whom had fallen the dangerous embassy. But the sage said nothing to indicate any choice on his part. He departed from the Yeshiva at once, leaving the disciples alone to choose the tempter from their number.

And although many eyes sought out Simeon, son of Rabbi Ismael, his selection was in no wise unanimous. For several others wished to assume the mission, and these were the students who had most openly expressed their doubts as to Beruriah's constancy.

And one of them spoke:

"In order to seduce Beruriah one need not be the most handsome, but the most subtle. One can steal into her heart, not through her eyes, but through her ears. Her eyes she can close before the most beautiful picture, but there is naught that can seal her ears against subtle speech. The beautiful picture that meets her gaze will vanish the moment she turns her head, but the guileful word will

remain in her heart, and delve and burrow. Remember, that even our mother Eve was conquered by wily words from the subtle serpent's mouth. As the Bible says, 'Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field.' And if Beruriah withstand the subtle word, then is her virtue beyond uncertainty."

And he spoke in such a way that all might see he was most subtle and should be their choice.

But a second arose and spoke:

"In order to win Beruriah one need be neither the handsomest nor the most subtle, but the strongest. For what is the beauty of our most beautiful against her beauty? And what is the guile of our most subtle against her subtlety? Our handsomest will quail before her, asking, 'Why am I so ugly?' And our cleverest will confront her like a helpless simpleton. But the presence of a powerful man will descend upon her senses like a cloud; the breath of immense masculine power will penetrate her like wine and intoxicate her. To make a woman bite into a forbidden apple, it takes a wily ser-

pent; but to make a woman lust for a man other than her husband, it requires one whose strength will work upon her like the pressure of two mill-stones. And if Beruriah withstand great masculine strength, then is her virtue beyond uncertainty."

And he spoke in such a way that all might see he was the strongest and should be their choice.

But a third arose and spoke:

"In order to gain Beruriah, one need not be the handsomest, the wildest or the strongest, but the most learned. For if our fellow-student is right in all he says as to the wisest and the wildest then must he surely recognise that not even masculine strength will touch Beruriah's soul. For she will tell herself, 'An untamed bull is stronger; and what man is more powerful than a lion? Shall I then languish with desire for the wild bull, the lion, and the elephant?' But the most learned of us will know how to call forth her admiration, and will win her heart through his skill in holy lore. And if her husband, our master Rabbi Mayer,

can demonstrate the purity of a reptile in one hundred and fifty different ways, then her seducer will have to be able, in twice one-hundred and fifty ways, to prove that Reuben did not sin with Bilhah, the wife of his father Jacob,—that King David did not sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and that Beruriah's sin against her husband will likewise be no sin. And if Beruriah withstand the great interpretative power of our most learned associate, then is her virtue beyond uncertainty."

And he spoke in such a way that all might see he was most learned and should be their choice.

Whereupon a fourth arose and spoke:

"In order to triumph over Beruriah, one need be neither the handsomest nor the williest, nor yet the strongest or the most learned. For the sum of his learning will be as naught against her own, and who dare assure us that he will not be left sitting before her like a pupil before a master? And will she not say that in our Yeshiva we study Torah only to make that

which is sinful appear pure? Therefore I say to you that in order to triumph over Beruriah one must be the most illustrious. And who is most illustrious if not he who can add to his personal gifts and to his own good name the pedigree of his noted family? Our master, Rabbi Mayer, Beruriah's husband, is endowed with many virtues. But he springs from lowly, convert stock, and his origin is but an impure source. How Beruriah's heart will melt with consuming desire when she feels the presence of one whose ancestry dates back to the kings of the House of David! And only after she has withstood the fascination of a genuine descendant from such illustrious forebears will her virtue have been proved beyond all doubt."

That by these words he meant to indicate himself there was not the slightest question, for he was one who claimed to be descended from the kings of the House of David, and flaunted his ancestry as a peacock displays its tail.

And now there arose one whom all viewed in the greatest astonishment, their eyes distended

and their mouths agape, for none could believe that he, too, would rise to speak. And he said:

"In order to seduce Beruriah, one must be the unhappiest of men."

And because the intense stupefaction with which his rising had been greeted dissolved now into uproarious laughter, he continued with louder voice and vehement gestures:

"Yes, the most unhappy and most wretched! You will succeed in approaching Beruriah's heart only through compassion. I need only relate to her, with tears in my voice and suffering in my eyes, how the words 'father, mother' were never uttered by my lips because my father died before I was born, and my mother died giving birth to me,—how I do not even know who brought me up, because I passed from hand to hand, one stumbling across me on the threshold of his home, another coming upon me before his door, in the darkness of black night. By day the sun scorched me, and by night the cold pierced my flesh, and I stilled my hunger with my cries. In all the world not one soul

could be found, who would adopt me as a son; they saw in me an evil visitation and only fear of God and His commandments held them back from putting me to death. And thus I grew up in hunger, necessity, and misery, without caresses, without a kiss, without a kind word, without a tender glance, without the slightest token of love, yet with a burning desire for affection and endearments. And I tell you that if Beruriah does not burst into flames of sinful lust out of compassion for me, then is her virtue indeed beyond uncertainty."

And because his words created a sensation, he was sure that he would be the chosen one.

But now the first to speak began anew, and after him the second, and then the third, and following them the fourth one and the fifth. And then all at the same time. Each tried to drown out the voices of the rest, to annihilate the others. And still others intruded into the discussion, until the Yeshiva resounded with such a tumult as rises from a crowded marketplace on a busy day.

Simeon, son of Rabbi Ismael, alone was silent. He was certain that he would be the chosen one, for thus had Rabbi Mayer spoken with his glance, and such was the will of God. And again, because Simeon, in addition to his great beauty, possessed the other qualities necessary to win Beruriah." For he felt that he was also the most unhappy. Who, indeed, could be more unhappy than he, whom God had been so unkind as to deprive of what should have been his, afterwards revealing to him what he had lost and filling his heart with hopelessness and grief? And let but the time arrive when he could tell Beruriah the tale of all his woes,—the trials that he had undergone for her,—then would she be overcome by pity, and in her heart compassion would pave the way for future love.

And Simeon smiled amidst the wordy din, and spoke no word. When, for a moment, the arguments subsided, again a host of eyes was turned to his. And they recalled that Rabbi Mayer's glance had really singled him out, and suddenly realised that no fitter messenger than

Simeon could be sent. And if Beruriah could withstand the fascination of the Adonis who had turned Jew, then was her virtue indeed beyond uncertainty.

And now from various sides the cry arose, "Let Simeon go! The handsome Simeon! The beautiful son of Rabbi Ismael!"

Thus was Simeon, the son of Rabbi Ismael, chosen to be the touchstone which should test the constancy and purity of the heart of Beruriah, wife of the Master, Rabbi Mayer.

V

He came to her with a letter from her husband, and the letter read, very simply: "The bearer, one of my students, will explain everything."

He found her in the garden before her house, alone with her thoughts, and she said, somewhat disturbed by a presentiment of evil tidings, "Pardon my not inviting you into my home to offer you refreshment and rest, for I am very anxious and impatient."

Simeon paused a moment to catch his breath and gain sufficient time thus to recall what had been planned and conspired in the Yeshiva, that the tale he bore should carry confidence and sound as if it were the very truth. Beruriah might be struck by a suspicion of intrigue and bring the plan to naught. Then he began, with a soft, flattering, reassuring voice, glancing downwards, as became a pious student of the Torah, a disciple of the pious Rabbi Mayer.

"Evil decrees are hatching against the Jews. The times of Emperor Hadrian threaten to return. Circumcision may be forbidden, and keeping the Sabbath. The study of the Torah may be proscribed."

Beruriah's answer echoed with deep pain: "The rumour aspires to evil reality."

"Agents have been sent out to seize the Yeshiva heads. Rabbi Mayer, Rabbi Simeon, son of Iuhai and Rabbi Judah, son of Ileai. The authorities wish to cut off the heads, thus destroying the body."

Beruriah, pale and trembling, cried in fright, "Have the Rabbis been caught?"

"No. The agents have not yet appeared. Perhaps the rumour concerning them is false, and they will never come. But already Rabbi Simeon, son of Iuhai, has gone into hiding and Rabbi Judah has closed his Academy and dismissed his students until the storm rolls by. Rabbi Mayer alone refuses to retreat from the spot where God has placed him and has devised a plan to outwit the authorities."

Beruriah, who had closed her eyes and raised her head to heaven, her heart filled with thanks that her husband was not so timorous as the others, now opened her eyes wide, piercing Simeon with their glance and awaiting with intense curiosity the details of Rabbi Mayer's plan.

Simeon recounted the project in a calm voice, with all the self-assurance of speaking the truth, yet with a certain wariness and fear of the inquiring look in her keen eyes.

"One of his students is to go to Rabbi

Mayer's home in Tiberias and live there near Beruriah, his wife. And when the agents come for Rabbi Mayer, his students are to declare that for a long time they have been wandering about like sheep without a shepherd, because Rabbi Mayer has forsaken them, and may be found at Tiberias, at home with Beruriah, his wife. When the pursuers come to Rabbi Mayer's home, they will find his scholar, whom they will naturally take for Rabbi Mayer, since he dwells under the same roof as Beruriah. Thus Rabbi Mayer will be able to continue expounding the Holy Law to his students, which is so necessary to the existence of the Jewish people, especially in times of sorrow."

Beruriah was disillusioned. Her heart was not in the plan. There was so much about it that was strange and suspicious. She thought for a moment, seeking some objection, and finally asked, "Suppose the agents know Rabbi Mayer?"

But the reply to this objection had been pre-

pared beforehand, and Simeon made answer in reassuring tones.

"Did you not hear me say 'his students are to declare'? If the agents come to the Academy they will not find Rabbi Mayer, for a hiding-place has already been secured, and guards will be on the lookout. And should the agents come here and recognise that I am not Rabbi Mayer, you can misdirect their steps and Rabbi Mayer will meanwhile seek new deliverance. But consider, if they do not know him, and if they take me for Rabbi Mayer?"

And Simeon drew himself to his full height, raising his head and showing her his eyes, which were deep brown in the glow of the setting sun that shone through the tall, green trees.

Beruriah thought, "It would be small wonder if the agents did take this man to be Rabbi Mayer." Yet this made her heart no lighter, and she asked, with quivering spirit, "How long will this have to endure?"

The answer to this was ready in advance.

•Thirty days. If, at the end of thirty days

the agents should not appear, then the rumour concerning them had been unfounded.

Simeon was waxing jubilant. The plan had so far easily succeeded and been accepted, and now his thirty days were to begin,—destined to be the richest, happiest days of all his life.

But Beruriah sighed heavily. Thirty days of uncertainty and terror, of sorrow and yearning. Then she asked, still sadder than before, "Will Rabbi Mayer not come home at all, in all the thirty days?"

Simeon, piously, almost with reproach, replied, "Would you have him steal time from the Holy Law and give it to you? It may be that the days of our Academy are numbered, and the days of the Torah in it."

Utterly downcast, she was barely able to whisper, "Will Rabbi Mayer not even send a messenger with news of himself?"

Simeon replied curtly, "Only in case Rabbi Mayer should meet with misfortune may you expect a messenger."

Sad and dissatisfied, she shook her head, ill

content with the plan her husband had devised. But she did not care to question further, and recalled her duties as hostess. • And thus she took in under her roof him who had been sent as the touchstone of her virtue, and gave him the room of Rabbi Mayer her husband. If the agents should come, there could be no doubt that he was Rabbi Mayer, head of the Yeshiva, who had left his Academy and his students and was living a secluded life at home, in the company of his beautiful wife. •

VI

Simeon entered into Rabbi Mayer's dwelling, which was to be his own for all of thirty days, and sat down to study. He knew that his voice was sweet and clear, and very masculine, so he began to read from the sacred books aloud. And it seemed to him that were he to draw aside the curtain which separated Rabbi Mayer's study from the other rooms he would discover Beruriah listening to his voice as he read. He felt her presence, heard her

breathing, inhaled her perfume. But he rubbed his forehead to banish these alien thoughts. He desired to study zealously, that Beruriah might detect nothing artificial in his actions, and yet in such wise, too, that the Holy Law be not affronted, and God cherish no anger against him.

For the first three days they saw nothing of each other. His food was brought to him by the aged servant, and whenever he left his room he would walk to the outside door with lowered eyes, looking neither to right nor to left, as one engrossed in deep and ponderous thoughts, afraid to be disturbed. Only on the evening of the fourth day did they meet, for it was the Sabbath eve and he recited grace and sang holy songs, blessing God for their food in a pious voice that was at once inspired and inspiring. And he knew that he was very beautiful, and that the sight of him was as balm to the soul, and that his voice was glorious,—a Sabbath-joy to hear. He looked but rarely at Beruriah; when, however, he raised his eyes to hers, she

was pierced by a vague, deep glance, filled with a manly power, yet very sad. And the colour of his eyes was as deeply dark as night, within them dancing the many lights that shone in the room and on the table, doing honour to the Sabbath.

And at night, on his couch, he began to sing, into the darkness of his room, various passages from the Bible, which he knew by heart. Among these were many of the most passionate lines of the Song of Songs. He sang with repressed tones, so that he disturb the sleep of none,—yet his voice filled the entire dwelling with sweet melancholy and deep unrest.

Beruriah lay yearning for Rabbi Mayer, her husband. And because it is not permitted to weep upon the Sabbath she banished from her soul all grief and longing, repeating softly the passages that reached her ear from Simeon, telling herself he was a most remarkable person,—this disciple of her husband,—and that of a certainty he must be one of the most illustrious of Rabbi Mayer's disciples, since he

had been chosen to impersonate his master. She thought, "If every Jew, however lowly, has yet within him a share of God above, how great indeed must be the share of him who possesses Torah and wisdom and beauty, a sweet voice and utmost refinement?"

The next day they met again at the Sabbath table. He recited grace and sang his pious songs, blessing the Lord for the food with exalted, Sabbath voice, which quivered, however, with a certain inquietude and sadness. Again he looked but rarely at Beruriah, with his vague, deep glance so full of manly power and yet so spiritless. And the colour of his eyes was a brilliant blue, even as the sky without, and they were radiant with will indomitable and pride of mastery. And at every glance of his Beruriah trembled with an unpleasant feeling, and she would think that it were better far if Rabbi Mayer were sitting there with her. She was happy that the Sabbath would soon be past, and that for another week she would not meet

Simeon,—this remarkable man who possessed so great a share of God—

After the prayer that closed the Sabbath she accompanied him to his room with a glance from the corner of her eye, and it seemed to her that she was being freed of care. But suddenly he stopped upon the threshold, and turned to her with exceeding tenderness.

"Forgive me the glances, my hostess, that I cast upon you yester eve and to-day."

She answered sternly and indifferently:

"And were they glances such as call for pardon?"

"Did you not feel them?"

"They did not offend me."

He stepped toward her.

"Oh, surely they did not offend you. How, indeed, could they? But they should have pained you."

"Pained me?"

She did not understand him.

"Your mother-heart."

He pronounced the words softly, with a sigh

and an abject countenance. Yet still she did not understand. Could it be that he referred to her two children, who had died on the same day,—a Sabbath day? His looks were sad indeed, yet how could she behold in them grief for her children or condolence with her? She spoke once more, quite drily:

“Even now I do not understand you.”

Then he told her the tale of a great misfortune that had befallen a mother, and the even greater heroism she had displayed. He spoke with deep sorrow and emotion in his voice and his eyes peered into the distance as if they beheld there a vision of a divine miracle. This was her own grievous misfortune,—her own heroism, but he told it as a tale that had once occurred,—as a miracle that had once taken place.

There was once a Jewish woman, the wife of a renowned Talmudic sage, and she had two sons of wondrous beauty. Little sons, yet already great hopes. Their father was gifted,

yet it could easily be seen that they were still more gifted. Whoever beheld them surrendered to their charm. The sight of them brought joy to all hearts and caused warmth to surge throughout one's being. And the mother was at a loss for thanks to God for the precious gifts that he had sent to her. When suddenly a plague assailed the town in which she dwelt and on a Sabbath day both her sons died while their father was at a House of Study, reciting the Holy Law before his fellow Jews. In order not to spoil her husband's Sabbath when he came home, she laid her two sons out in a distant room, covering them with a black shroud, and then sat down to await her husband's coming, dressed in her Sabbath clothes and on her face a Sabbath air. And when her husband came he could not read from her bearing that a thunderbolt had struck their home, destroying its most treasured possessions.

Accustomed to see his children at the Sabbath table, he asked "Where are our sons?"

The first time she told him a lie and her voice was calm and reassuring:

"Soldiers marched through the town with drums and music, and the children were anxious to see the gay parade. They begged so prettily I could not say them nay, and let them go together with the old servant."

Her husband eyed her in astonishment.

"A children's disease is epidemic here; the angel of death lurks now in every street; and you have let our sons trail after a procession?"

She lay her head against his bosom as if to win his pardon, and said, "If God so wills it, Death plucks his victims even in the greatest seclusion."

The hours of the day passed and he asked again, "Why have our little sons not yet returned?"

And again she answered calmly, with reassurance, "The procession cannot be over yet; or else, they have stopped somewhere to play."

And she asked him to forgive them for having so childishly forgotten their home, and per-

suaded him to harbour no uneasiness. Could he not see that she was calm?

But when evening had fallen and time for the closing prayer of Sabbath had come, he became once more uneasy, and exclaimed, "I do not understand you. How can you be so calm? It is already so dark, and still our sons are not here."

And again she answered serenely and soothingly:

"I am at ease because I know that God is with them on all their ways."

Now he was ashamed to feel uneasiness, and recited the closing prayers. When he had finished, she turned to him quietly:

"I have a question to propound to you, my husband. Some one has entrusted to my keeping two jewels, with permission to use them and take joy in them. And I have really used them and taken in them much joy. They were my adornment and my playthings, my infinite happiness for many a year. Now the owner has

come and asks their return. Shall I give them back or keep them for my own?"

In wonder, her husband looked at her and replied, with astonishment, "You ask? And can there be a question here? Be thankful to him for the pleasure that he brought you with these two jewels for so many years, and give them back."

Whereupon she took him by the hand and led him to the room where lay their sons, and uncovered them.

"See, God gave us in trust two wondrous jewels. To-day he came to us and asked them back. Let us be grateful to Him for the joy He has given. . . ."

Simeon could bear to speak no longer. His emotions rose; his voice was choked with tears.

Beruriah, however, through all this time, had not interrupted the telling of the tale. His voice was so sweet, so touching, and had so strangely reopened her old wound and renewed her great grief. And she followed his every

word and the great grief within her, farther and farther, more engrossed, more intent than ever. When, overcome by his own emotion, he had interrupted his tale, she was very pale, her eyes staring vaguely before her. In a voice that came from a parched throat and dry lips, she asked, "Why have you told me the tale of my own misfortune? Why have you opened my wound anew? Do you think, then, that I did not love my sons? Do you imagine I have forgotten them?"

Simeon made answer, "Forgive me if I have hurt you. But ever since I heard from your husband, Rabbi Mayer, the story of your wonderful composure, I have longed to know whence you received the courage; and the overwhelming strength,—how came it to you? And as I sat before the Sabbath table yester eve and to-day, my eyes sought the answer in your mother-heart."

He looked at her, filled with pity, and after a brief silence she said to him, "You forget that I am the daughter of the martyr Hanino Tra-

dinus. When the Roman executioner was torturing him in slow flames, he lay on his pyre reciting from the Torah as if he felt no pain. Do you really believe that he was free of pain? Do you think that he did not feel the tongues of fire? But God was great and powerful within him, and He is no less powerful in me."

Simeon closed his eyes, for a deep pang had rent his heart; he kneeled and kissed the hem of her garment. Beruriah reddened and whispered, scarce audibly, "And I love my husband passionately. It was for his consolation that I found sufficient strength in me to restrain my grief and not drown in my tears."

Simeon left the room without a word, like a blind man groping his way, his heart a prey to pain and his every limb atremble.

Beruriah, however, buried her head in her hands and remained seated as if rooted to the spot alone with her two departed ones that she had never ceased to love. Her glance was fixed upon the distance, brimming with sorrow and yearning for past joys and hopes forever lost,

her heart wailing, almost breaking, but without a tear in her burning eyes.

God had given; God had taken away.
Blessed be His Name.

No, she would not weep, although her wound and her grief had been renewed in so touching a manner.

And suddenly her thoughts turned to him who had awakened her wound and her grief in so appealing a fashion,—to his voice and his eyes and his countenance, with its expression of deep condolence.

But Simeon knew nothing of this. Deeply wounded, he strode into the dense, black darkness of his room, and stood there motionless, his head bowed, his eyes closed. His love would awaken no response. The hopes he had built were vain. This wonderful woman, who had been able to master the keenest grief because she was as strong as a giant in her God and in her love for her husband, would surely be able to withstand all the wiles of seduction and all thoughts of lust. She would not behold

his beauty; she would not be impressed by his learning. Her eyes would be sealed against him, and even if she looked at him she would not see him. And if his heart bled she would say: "He deserves his punishment." What was there now to do? Why should he remain any longer? He must go back,—return to the Yeshiva and bring the certainty that there was no stronger woman than Beruriah. Then he would bury his own grief within him forever.

He stretched forth his hands in the gloom as if to cry out, and clinched his fists as if thus to crush his woe, and at the same moment felt that he would *not* return. His longing for Beruriah was great, and who could measure the worth of thirty days spent in her company? To see her and hear her for thirty days! - Who could appraise that boon? And if he should return so soon, his comrades would say, "We all knew how strong was Beruriah on the day her two sons died, and yet we sent you as a touchstone to test her strength and purity. And since we knew that three days were too few, we stipu-

lated all of thirty." And who could tell? Perhaps her heart had weakened under the grievous burden that Death had laid upon it, and now she would be unable any longer to resist love?

At this last thought it seemed that the darkness of his room was flooded with brightness. And see, the servant had really brought in a light. He was overjoyed and sat down to his books. And in his voice there rang a certain note that surely must convey to Beruriah the depth of desire which was in his heart.

VII

He considered his future attitude and planned his campaign. He would not appear before her until the following Sabbath; but he would let her hear his voice. From early morn till late at night let her hear his voice—his voice that was so charming and melodious, so masculine. Let it follow her about through all the rooms, into the garden before the house, into the seclusion of her bed. Let it ac-

company her in her thoughts and sing with her in all her prayers. And always, in case of accidental meeting, his beard would be well combed and his head-covering would sit so well over his high forehead that his beauty would compel her eyes, and the bearing of his body would summon to her the same thoughts that had occurred to the Roman matron.

The first day of that week his voice and his reciting sounded very mournful, and on the second and third days it was likewise very sad. And on those days his distant gaze, at their accidental meetings, was full of pity and sorrow. But on the fourth day a change came over his voice. It rang with joy and a zest for life, and when by accident they met he looked at her most ardently, with glad rapture; she stopped and followed him with her eyes, unable to understand the great change. The sadness of his voice and the longing in his glance she had understood, and had explained in divers ways. His own life was surely no happy one; all Israel suffered eternal persecution; her home was

a house of mourning. Then how could a person be happy beneath its roof? Her very proximity must inspire sadness. But the rejoicing in his voice and the rapture of his glance she could neither understand nor justify. And all that day his voice disquieted her; at night it weighed still heavier upon her in the loneliness of her bed. Why was he so happy? What was chanting so joyously in his heart? "How do his eyes look now?" she asked herself, and grew ashamed at her thoughts, directing them to Rabbi Mayer. She longed for him, hoping that the thirty days would fly by as soon as possible.

On the next day and the day following the great joy was with him still. Beruriah's astonishment likewise continued. Once and again she wished to stop him at one of their accidental meetings and ask the significance of the great change that had come over him. But Beruriah would not ask. Not the wife of Rabbi Mayer. What was this student, after all, to her? Why should she be at all con-

cerned with what was passing in the heart of this strange man? She was neither his mother nor his sister; not even a friend of former years. Did it become Beruriah to be inquisitive? Was Rabbi Mayer's wife, then, like other women? But she noticed that the stranger had become even handsomer, more powerful, more masculine.

Sabbath eve came once again and he said grace and sang the holy songs, blessing the Lord with a voice more exalted than ever, more filled than ever with the Sabbath spirit, more than ever inspired and inspiring. Again he looked not often at his hostess, but when he raised his eyes to seek her glance, they had a faraway look filled with admiration and ecstasy, and their colour was the colour of a flaming ruby set in black, as if the Sabbath candles glowed within them.

And again that night on his couch he sang into the darkness of his room various passages from the Bible, which he knew by heart, and in particular many verses from the Song of Songs,

the song of love and passion and infinite yearning. His voice throbbed with joy and yet it quivered with a deep unrest; and a great yearning spoke in it, as if calling for something that could render its happiness complete.

And Beruriah lay quite restless in her place. The singer's voice inundated her being, nor could she banish its magnetic sound. She tried to think of Rabbi Mayer, but instead found herself repeating the passages that came to her from Simeon's room. And suddenly there flashed upon her the idea that Rabbi Ismael's son must cherish a love in his heart. It must be a wife or a sweetheart; either he loved her with intense passion or was longing for her endlessly. And if his voice was now so joyful it must be that of the thirty days a third had already passed, and he would soon return to his beloved.

Now, however, she could no longer repeat after him the verses from the Song of Songs, from him to *her*,—his beloved; his wife or his sweetheart. Beruriah buried her head in her

pillows, pulled the coverlet over it, and stopped her ears with her hands so as to keep out Simeon's voice and his love verses; she turned all her thoughts to Rabbi Mayer and began to recite the other passages from the Song of Songs,—the passages from her to him, and her heart languished for him, for her husband, for her beloved, for her great love and yearning.

And once more, after the Sabbath closing prayers, before he went into his room he turned to her with great tenderness.

"Forgive me the glances, my hostess, that I cast upon you yester eve and to-day."

She shuddered at the unexpectedness of his words, and could not understand his begging pardon.

"What manner of glances were they?" she asked.

He whispered softly, "Then you did not notice them?"

"They were glances of intensest exaltation, filled with wonderment and deep-felt ardour. However, they did not belong to me."

"You are wrong. To you!"

"To me?"

She rose to her full height and her face grew pale and austere.

He, in ecstasy, proclaimed, "Yes, to you!—Have you beheld how joyous I have been these last few days?"

"I heard it in your voice."

"And do you know the cause?"

"Have you, then, told me?"

"I'll tell you now. The cause was you alone."

Her face assumed an even colder expression, and her eyes became even sterner. The shadow of anger crossed her forehead and her brows, and he cried out, with delight, as if to drive away the evil shadow:

"Oh, Beruriah, hear me out! For three days and three nights I was filled with the grief of your grief; for three days and three nights I have not ceased to ask why you were so heavily punished with the death of your two little ones—You, the chosen of God,—you, the

blessed one! If I asked that even before I knew you, how then must it have cried aloud within me when the greatness of your soul was discovered to me in all its splendour? To think that *you* of all should be martyred so! That *you* should be the victim of a never-ending sorrow! And my heart rebelled within me, and like Job I could see no justice in the ways of God. And when one ceases to behold justice in the ways of God, how dark and dreary must the world become! But suddenly, on the fourth day, it seemed to me as if God must have raised a trifle the veil that screens the purpose of His deeds and allowed me to gaze upon their goal. How would the world have realised the grandeur of your soul, if not through the great grief that befell you? How should we have known what Beruriah was, if her heart had not been delivered into the hands of the torturer? Your two sons, had they lived, would have made mankind richer by two living beings,—perhaps worthless ones, unnecessary, unhappy; but through their death

they made humanity the richer by a living Beruriah. Now for the first time do we conceive what we possess in you; now for the first time do we know your worth. That which lay veiled in darkness has been illuminated by a glorious light. Boundless treasures that have lain buried have been brought forth for the use of all. We have all grown richer through you, and future generations will enjoy that wealth. As from a spring of life humanity will imbibe its power from you, its consolation. 'See,' they will say, 'how Beruriah mastered her enormous grief, her double bereavement. Emulate her and be consoled!' Oh, Beruriah, when this flashed upon me, how could I help feel joyous, and how could I keep my glances from betraying exaltation and admiration for you?"

And before Beruriah could open her lips to make reply, he fell to his knees and kissed the hem of her garment, pressing it to his lips far longer than the first time; then he arose and left the room, holding his head erect, half-dancing, in token of his jubilation. And soon his voice

was resounding through the house,—a ringing, singing, joyous, jubilant voice, filled with power and fervour. Was not Beruriah now full of him? Had he not won her now?

Beruriah sat in confusion, indeed full of his voice and his presence, and at times it seemed as if an angel from heaven were addressing her. Only when she was able to give thought to what he had said could she liberate herself from his spell. Her mind grew clearer and with a sigh she rose. And this is what she told her unhappy mother-heart:

"It is possible that the world has been made richer, and that such was the purpose of God when he took from me my two children. He has His goal and His aims, and His ways are hidden from our sight. But I have become so poor, so poor. . . ."

VIII

During the whole of the first day of the new week his voice was scarcely heard, and Beruriah wondered. Had anything hap-

pened to him? She fairly longed for his voice. The aged servant, however, brought her the news that the guest, for the most part, paced back and forth in his room. And when he seated himself at his table, he buried his head in his arms and remained thus motionless.

And Beruriah said that surely he had encountered a difficult passage in the Torah. Rabbi Mayer, too, was in the habit of acting so when confronted by a perplexing problem, and the student must take after the master.

Yet that same evening his voice was heard again, but altogether altered. There was in it nothing of its former joyousness, and nothing of its still earlier sorrow. There was, however, a certain something that made Beruriah listen, pouring unrest into her soul. It was a note of yearning, and a note of entreaty. A sort of petulance, as if from a pampered child, and a kind of supplication, like a beggar at the door. What did his voice wish now to say? What did it mean now? To whom was he now speaking? To God? To his own heart? In

what measure was she, Beruriah, here involved? If at first it had been she who sounded in his voice, what did he wish of her now? Was he praying to God in her behalf? What did he ask of God for her?

She tossed from side to side upon her bed, and thought how really wondrous was this man. She saw him stand before her in all his beauty, with his sadness and his fervour, and with his eyes in which the colours dissolved; she heard his voice, which penetrated her heart and her very soul; she exiled her thoughts with the ardent prayer that the thirty days should pass as quickly as possible.

But the days that followed dragged on frightfully, for they were filled with a rising pathos and plaintiveness in Simeon's voice,—with increasing supplication and entreaty. It rose to an ever louder appeal for pity, an ever more languishing cry for love. The air in Beruriah's room became difficult for her to breathe and she began to seek calm in long walks and frequent visits, but she was haunted

by the sensation that there in her room resounded Simeon's yearning, imploring voice. And the voice followed her into the distant streets, walked with her into the strangers' houses, took part in all her conversations. Returning to her home became for Beruriah a trial. She could not bear to listen to the voice; she feared it, and feared even more an accidental meeting with him, for the far-off gaze of his eyes, which had now become quite black, gleamed with such desire and love-entreaty that it was impossible for a human soul to bear it.

She awaited the Sabbath eve with a throbbing bosom. The approach of the holy day brought her no pleasure. Her first thought was to have notified him that she was ill and could not come to table. But her second thought was that Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Mayer, should not resort to pretexts, or hide from any one. What, indeed, was Simeon to her? What mattered to her the unrest of his heart? She should never have noticed the quality of his voice or the colour of his eyes.

And if he should ask again whether she had remarked his glances, she would reply that she did not wish to be questioned so, since his glances were of no concern to her. Let him better ask of Rabbi Mayer whether he might inquire of her about his glances.

And thus she remained to hear his Sabbath blessings and his Sabbath songs.

But his voice no longer rang with its Sabbath tones. It was like a melodious violin that had cracked. He thanked God and blessed Him, but as one who *must* thank and *must* bless, and whose heart is not in his deeds, because he is discontent and wronged. He ate, too, as one who compels himself, without appetite, against his will and sparingly. His cloud-grey eyes looked less at the food before him than at Beruriah, and his glances were Desire itself,—Yearning itself.

And when, in the darkness of the night, there began to resound through the house verses from the Song of Songs, in a voice as of doves cooing, like the cry of a heart dissolving

in desire, Beruriah laid her pillow upon her head and placed her fingers in her ears, and her heart began to beat most rapidly. She knew that the verses were meant for her, were sent to her, spoke to her, longed for her, implored her.

And as she lay, she spoke to her heavy heart:

"Lord of the universe, is it not enough that Thou hast punished my heart? Must Thou punish another heart through me? If I am to be a consolation unto them who believe in Thee, how dost Thou now wish to make me the great grief and the despair of one of Thy worshippers? Lord of the universe, was Beruriah, Thy chosen one, Thy blessed one, born to experience misfortune and to spread it? Lord God, I wept not on Thy holy Sabbath, when both my little children passed away. Wouldst Thou have me now to weep before Thee? Oh, God of Abraham, turn his heart from me, and turn his thoughts to Thee. Reveal me that infinite grace, Lord of the universe!"

And because Simeon, at this juncture, ceased his singing, overcome by grief and weariness as

sleep, like a heavy burden, pressed his lids, it seemed to Beruriah that God had heard her prayer. She now removed the pillow from her head and placed it underneath with a sigh of relief, filled with gratitude. Then she fell into a peaceful slumber.

On the following day, however, Beruriah saw that God had not heard her prayer nor answered it. For the voice of Rabbi Ismael's son was charged with supplication and his eyes brimmed over with desire. And it was after the closing prayers, when Simeon had turned to Beruriah to ask about his glances. Beruriah was not to be seen. She had disappeared, because she knew that his mouth could be stopped and his lips sealed by neither sharp speech nor angry rebuke. His accumulated yearning would find a way, and his passion would burst from his heart; he would sin grievously against God with his words and his deeds. And how would she then be able to keep him under her roof? And the thirty days were not yet over.

But Simeon knew that Beruriah had noticed

his glances and interpreted his voice aright. His heart was therefore flooded with joy and hope. She had disappeared because she felt her weakness; her strength had begun to waver. The struggle within her had already commenced, and he would be her conqueror.

IX

For three days longer the yearning and the entreaty continued. And of a sudden the voice was transformed into a wild, unbearable shrieking. Simeon had fallen into despair. The thirty days were fast drawing to a close and his love for Beruriah had flamed up like the fires of hell. He lost his peace of mind entirely, and his body began to be consumed by passion. His cheeks grew thin, his eyes looked sunken, reddish-yellow, ill. It seemed to him as if his body were incessantly smitten, and within, his being cried aloud its pain. His voice took up the cry. But it was the cry of the ox for the cow,—only more passionate, more pain-stricken, more excruciating.

When Beruriah heard such a voice she was seized with trembling; a feeling of disgust surged over her. For days at a time she shunned her very dwelling, but the suffering of repulsion she carried plainly with her. Whoever met her said, "Beruriah is stricken with an evil illness." And her friends questioned her, "What has befallen you?" She avoided all encounter with Simeon, and at night in her room she had her aged servant stay with her. Friday evening she had Simeon notified that she could not come to table, but that she would hear his saying of grace from where she lay. His saying of grace, however, caused her to shudder. He groaned it rather than recited it. His breath came like that of an animal wounded unto death. His voice was hoarse and choked with angry tears. He barely approached his food and looked around with savage eyes. The old domestic heaved a sigh of thankfulness when Simeon dashed from the dining-room. Had he sung the Sabbath songs? Had he blessed the Lord? Or had he been uttering

blasphemy altogether? His voice rang more with upbraiding than with benediction. Now he knew that God had forsaken him, and had showed him Beruriah only to crush him. Need he restrain himself? Need he pretend? Let the woman know how he was suffering through her,—how he loved her, how he desired her.

And amidst the gloom of his room, he repeated in a voice made hoarse with lust, passages from the Song of Songs,—those impregnated with most love and passion.

“How fair and how pleasant art thou, Oh love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the branches thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples.”

He sang them again and again, wildly, passionately, lustfully.

And Beruriah was engulfed in still deeper loathing. It was as though some one had made her body unclean. She huddled together, shud-

dering. She opened her eyes wide, peering into the dense darkness, speaking to God as if she beheld Him there before her, in the gloom.

"I accepted as a boon the grievous sorrow Thou sentest unto me. But this indignity I cannot suffer. How have I merited it? What is Thy aim? How have I sinned that Thou so shouldst humble me? My heart is weak and wracked; wouldst Thou rend it utterly? Then tear it out, Oh Lord, and I will thank Thee. But remove from me the burden of this insult. Deliver me from this uncleanness."

The lustful voice, however, did not cease. Indeed, it rang with even greater lust, grovelling before her, embracing her, clawing her. And Beruriah groaned like a wounded deer, taking refuge beneath her pillow and her coverlet, as if to smother herself, prepared to die—

All that Sabbath day she remained in her room, behind lock and key,—indignant, overcome by aversion, anger, fury. Too, on the other days she avoided Simeon, even as a

nauseating leper is tremblingly shunned. But on the thirtieth day Simeon lay in waiting, and late in the afternoon met her face to face. He was dressed ready for his departure, staff in hand and wallet across his shoulder. But not the proud, handsome Simeon stood before her; not the Adonis who had turned Jew. He was wan, thin, bent; his face sallow, his eyes sunken, feverish and red; his beard unkempt; his head-covering awry. Adonis had forgotten to be beautiful. Adonis had become infirm and old. Adonis bore in his heart a fatal wound.

Beruriah straightened up in all her pride, in all her beauty, and looked at him ruthlessly, haughtily, wishing to pass him by. But he barred her way. A moment they eyed each other without a word; then he opened his lips and spoke to her:

"Cursed be the day when I first gazed upon you, but sevenfold accursed be the day on which my companions chose me to be your touchstone, and seventy-seven times accursed be the day on which I crossed the threshold of your home.

May these days be obliterated from God's year, and may the memory of them be a curse for generations. May they be days of calamity——"

Beruriah interrupted his malediction, speaking with merciless austerity:

"Job, too, did once the same and cursed a day of God's. You may spare yourself this art of imprecation. Go your way and thank God that he led you to Beruriah's home, and brought you not to greater sin,—Thank Him that two souls were rescued from eternal perdition. But before you leave, explain one thing to me. What do you mean when you say that your companions chose you to be my touchstone? If I understand you aright——"

Her glance was sharp and deeply penetrating, and Simeon replied, "You have understood me aright!"

With eyes agape and quickening breath she questioned further.

"And the story of the agents was a lie?"

Simeon answered feverishly, trembling in every limb.

"The tale was false from the beginning to the end. No single word of truth was in it. The Academy, who knew the fortitude of your heart against death, wished to know, too, the strength of your heart against love. And they chose me——"

Again she interrupted his account, with staring eyes and breath that came in gasps.

"And—Rabbi—Mayer?"

"*He* devised the plan."

She uttered a shriek as if her heart had suddenly been pierced, breathed heavily and shut her eyes. A moment later she asked, with her eyes still closed, "Did Rabbi Mayer, too, desire to know the fortitude of my heart against sinful love?"

And Simeon answered weakly, wearily:

"At first he flew into a fury against the students for their doubts as to your virtue, but afterwards their mistrust became his mistrust."

Beruriah, astounded, groaned with pain, and Simeon continued his account:

“‘The apple is wondrous fair,’ said Rabbi Mayer, ‘but who can say what passes in its heart?’ ”

Beruriah moaned, more heavily grieved than ever. And Simeon, mercilessly, indifferently, wearily added, “And he said, ‘What does one do to learn whether the beautiful apple is sound at the core? He cuts it open——’ ”

Beruriah turned, wincing as if under knives, and suddenly wailed in a voice that was not her own, “Go!” Then she rushed into her room, her eyes closed, stupefied, stunned.

And Simeon went forth upon his way, slowly, exhaustedly, his head bowed and his limbs heavy, like one who has been banished into exile,—homeless and forlorn.

X

Beruriah stood in her room, pressing her hands to her face, to her eyes, as if seeking to drive something away,—a nightmare.

an evil vision. She closed her eyes, suddenly, and as suddenly opened them wide—once, twice, three times; her heart beat wildly and shrieked strange things within her.

"He had doubts about me! He sent a man to test me! Is it possible? Is it possible?"

She ran in pursuit of Simeon. She must question him further. Perhaps he had told her a lie? Perhaps this tale of testing was his own invention? Perhaps the story about the agents was the truth? Perhaps she had heard wrong? May it not all have been a fiction of her imagination? Maybe it was all an evil dream?

Simeon was far along the road, walking with heavy step, as if grown old. She wished to call to him, to run after him, but suddenly it came to her that this was neither an evil dream nor her fantasy,—that this time the son of Rabbi Ismael had not deceived her. The curse that he had called down upon the second day had surely not been feigned. The words he had put into Rabbi Mayer's mouth came surely from Rabbi Mayer.

Tears began to oppress her and she hastened back to her room, threw herself upon the bed and burst into long and bitter weeping. She tore her hair, sank her nails into her cheeks, bit the bed-clothes beneath her, wailing and lamenting. But when she heard the steps of her aged servant, she mastered herself, grew quiet and lay there calmly. She placed herself so that it might appear she lay there thus, asleep.

The servant brought in lights and reminded her that it was time to eat the evening meal. Beruriah stammered she was feeling ill that evening and that food would do her harm. But the kind old servant tempted her with some dainties and asked whether the mistress would want her company that night, too, in the bedroom. Receiving the answer "No," she wished Beruriah good-night and walked away to her usual place.

Beruriah lay with open eyes and gazed into the shadows of the half-lighted room. Her head was in a maze; she could not think a single

definite thought. She only knew that a terrible misfortune had befallen her,—a misfortune greater far than the loss of her two sons,—a catastrophe great beyond all explanation. She could not yet conceive it; it was such as must undo her evermore,—must work the profoundest transformation in her life.

And all at once she wearily arose, her eyes dilated, gazing straight ahead.

Yes. Even so. Rabbi Mayer could be her husband no longer.

She clenched her teeth and fortified her heart; her distended eyes still fixed their glance before her. Now she could think quite clearly.

Had Rabbi Mayer himself betrayed no doubt, but simply yielded to the doubts of others, she would have felt no insult and her heart would have remained quite calm. She would have rejoiced at the strength of his faith in her. And her own strength, too, would have been a double boon. She would have twitted him upon the daring step he had taken, and told him that such a course was

foolish, and would have aided him to triumph over the evil cavillers, who had dared to drag her down into the mire of their suspicions.

But he alone had doubted! He alone had desired the test, to support his faith in her. He alone had dared be unassured of his Beruriah's strength! Her own husband had not known her heart and had sullied its purity with the filth of doubt!

Suppose she had not triumphed over the test? The peril had been great; the handsome Simeon, too, was very dangerous. Yet Rabbi Mayer had not feared to lose her. He had risked her in a game,—had led her to sacrifice!

He could be her husband no longer!

She repeated this over and over again, insistently, with raging harshness cutting it into her soul.

He should have to grant her a divorce; she should remain alone. All alone,—all, all alone.

A bitter grief assailed her, making her close her eyes, and a great wretchedness enfolded

her. She was seized with a deep yearning for her departed children; her heart went out to them; she stretched forth her hands to them, and pressed her hands to her bosom, shaking her head; the tears came fast as she whispered fond endearments and mother-words.

She saw them before her, just as they looked in the final days before their sudden death. Playful, laughing, bright. She felt their presence so plainly that she looked around for them. No. They were not there. They were dead. They lay in the distant graveyard, deep in the cold earth, encased in boards. Strewn with earth. Alone they lay there, so forsaken,—her little darlings,—and were longing perhaps for their mother, even as their mother longed for them.

This thought sank deep and took root in her heart. At last she began to weep softly, convulsively:

“My children need me, and I have need of them.”

And when she had wept out all her tears she

made a resolution. Once this was determined upon she turned to God.

"What I am about to do is a great transgression. I will disobey Thy sacred commandment and violate Thy counsel. But I cannot do otherwise. God in heaven, I can live no longer. May the good merits of my father intercede for me. The worth of my father, the holy martyr, who refused the offer of the executioner to hasten his horrible death, lest the forced hastening resemble, in Thine eyes, self-murder. May he protect me. Thou wilt have to grant his daughter forgiveness for taking her own life in order all the sooner to meet her children. Eternal God, take me to them; part us nevermore. Punish me not after death as severely as Thou hast punished me in my life. I surrender my soul into Thy merciful hands. I go to Thee and to my children."

Now she arose from her bed and garbed herself in purest white, writing with firm hand something upon a tablet.* Then from a casket she drew a small, sharp knife, testing its blade

upon her finger-nail. Calmly and piously she prayed "Hear, Oh Israel," and severed the veins of both her arms. With blood streaming from her, and without a cry of pain, she extinguished the light, stretched herself out upon the bed, and began the journey to her little ones.

She kept her eyes wide open as she lay there bleeding to death, and beheld her children before her. Far off there in the graveyard, in their graves, they had sat up, white and steeped in sadness, awaiting her arrival. And she said to them, "Wait, I come to you, my darling sons! Soon I shall be with you, precious hearts!" Endlessly she whispered fond endearments, mother-words.

Not for a moment did she give a thought to the olden days. She could behold only her children and the road to them. Only at the end, when the long, long sleep was coming over her and the vision of her children and the way to them grew blurred and dim, did she utter in

peaceful yearning, with silent tears, "Mayer! Mayer!"

XI

And it happened that when the handsome Simeon returned to the Yeshiva the students there cried out in horror at his altered looks.

"See," he exclaimed, "what has overtaken me because for thirty days I dashed myself against the stony strength of Beruriah. Her strength and purity are above all uncertainty, but I am utterly undone."

And Rabbi Mayer glowered triumphantly at his disciples, took his staff and wallet and left to seek Beruriah. But he found her dead,—gone to join her children. And on the tablet were written these few words: "He who cuts open the apple also destroys it."

He seized his temples, his eyes expanded wildly, and he burst forth into a heart-breaking, soul-rending wail: "Beruriah!"

THE TEMPTATIONS OF RABBI AKIBA

THE TEMPTATIONS OF RABBI AKIBA

HEAVENS, how stern and pious a Jew this Rabbi Akiba was! Scarcely his peer to be found in all Judea.

He devoted all his days and all his nights to the Holy Law, studying it himself and expounding it to others. The number of his disciples was a veritable army, and whoever heard the Torah from his lips felt that he drank from the very source of life.

Not only did he teach the Torah's word, but also how to live its very spirit, how to purge oneself of gaiety; for laughter, play and mirth all led to sin.

He, too, dwelt in all simplicity, renouncing every earthly pleasure. He was deeply in love with his wife, the beautiful Rachel, the wise and learned daughter of Kalba-Sabua. But in order to belong entirely to the Torah he even parted

from his sweet beloved and became an ascetic.

This was a sore burden to him. He longed deeply for his wife, and he was still a man in the very prime of life. In order not to weaken, and to make sure of maintaining this separation and his pious seclusion, he made a vow to himself that he should not return to his wife until he acquired twelve thousand disciples. This he did because he held that an oath was as a wall around holy retirement. He would have to keep his word and his absence from his wife would thus be ensured.

This fortitude, however, caused him to be unrelenting toward every one else. What he could do, all must be able to do. And he demanded of all the strictest abstention from the sins of the flesh, excoriating with barbed words the desire for women in the hearts of men.

Whereupon the weaklings—those who could not withstand the woman-lust in their hearts and were wracked by the sins of the flesh—spoke thus of Akiba:

“Merely because he was able to part from

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his wife is no proof that he is above temptation. Let Satan but approach him in the form of a naked woman and lust will suddenly befall him like an enemy from ambush, and rob him of all his senses, even as a thief robs his victim in the night."

And they added to their prayers an entreaty that God should lead the Rabbi into such temptation. And, to their own punishment, God heard their prayers.

When Rabbi Akiba left his wife he also left the city in which she dwelt. This he did, not so much from personal choice, lest the proximity of his wife allure him, but rather for her sake, lest his nearness too much affect her. And in order that his wife, in her feminine weakness, should not follow him to the new place in which he intended to settle, he did not for a long time establish himself anywhere, journeying from city to city and from land to land.

And once, in his peregrinations, he came to a land in which remarkable customs and manners

prevailed. One of these customs was to sweeten the nights of the honoured guests with the company of women.

And it happened that when the ruler of this land learned of Rabbi Akiba's arrival and the importance of his guest, he sent to him for the night two beautiful damsels, the most beautiful in his realms. In the manner of women both beauties did their best to heighten their charms and increase the power of their attraction. They freshened themselves in the bath; the enchanting odour of their youthful bodies they rendered more intoxicating than ever with rare perfumes; they arrayed themselves seductively like brides on the wedding night. And they came to Rabbi Akiba in radiant half-nakedness, with an inviting smile upon their cherry lips, with the fire of passion and voluptuousness in their sparkling eyes.

They knew that they were going to a highly honoured guest, but they did *not* know that they would encounter a very handsome man of gigantic stature. When they beheld him their

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passion flamed still higher, and each tried to display before him the most enticing allurements of her person.

"Come to me," said one.

"Come to me," invited the other.

And they passed close to him with their naked bodies, and each praised her person and its charms, and the pleasures it afforded.

"My body is as white as the full moon."

"And my body is as rosy as the rising sun."

"In my embrace you will lie as softly as in warm down."

"And in my arms you will feel the tender warmth of newly-shorn lambs' wool."

"The kiss of my lips is like the wine of Damascus."

"And my lips are like the round grapes in which the sunbeams have chosen their home."

And thus they continued,—the firmness of their breasts, the velvety softness of their skin, the ravishing delight of their legs, and the intoxication of their tenderness. One wrapped him about with her dark hair; the blonde

tresses of the other likewise enmeshed him. And with the passing of the hours their lust increased; their naked bodies turned and writhed, wracked and tortured by rising desire.

"Come, take me!" implored the one.

"Come, take me!" panted the other.

But Rabbi Akiba sat between them and—spat. For a whole night he sat between them and spat, looking neither upon one nor the other. He did not try to distract his mind with Torah thoughts, for he did not wish to bring the Torah into the company of two naked women. He simply tried to work himself into a feeling of repulsion, to rouse within him a powerful resistance.

And thus he sat and spat—more vehemently, more impatiently than ever, with rising disgust, with increasing aversion. At last, however, he became calm, indifferent, ice-cold.

At first the two beautiful damsels looked at him in astonishment. Why was he spitting so? Why did he not touch them? Was he a fool? Was he crazy? Were they not beautiful

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enough? Not young enough? Not passionate enough?

They questioned him; he vouchsafed no reply. Then they were on the point of leaving him, when they looked at him again and saw how handsome he was, and gazed once more into his eyes and saw wisdom itself beaming out of them. Then they forgot his remarkable behaviour, disregarded his incessant spitting, threw their nakedness and the fire of their bodies upon him, and pleaded and begged and groaned, calling to him in their intoxication.

"Take *me*!"

"Take *me*!"

The whole night passed in this way. In the morning, weary and exhausted, they went to the ruler and complained to him against Rabbi Akiba. In despair, they cried out, "Sooner death than another time with that man!"

The ruler sent for Rabbi Akiba and questioned him.

"Why did you not act toward the women I sent in to you as the sons of man act with

women? Are they not beautiful? Are they not human, like you? Has not He, who created you, likewise created them?"

If Rabbi Akiba had replied that, in spending the night with them in the manner of the sons of man with woman, he would have committed a sin, then the ruler would surely become angry. Did his hospitality then lead to sin? Was his hospitality an incentive to wrong-doing?

Rabbi Akiba's wisdom saw this at once, and with an altogether innocent expression he replied, "What could I do? Before they came to me they must surely have eaten impure things, and the odour from them was that of carrion-meat, impurities, reptiles."

And Rabbi Akiba quickly left this land with its remarkable hospitality, happy in the consciousness that he had overcome the greatest of temptations,—filled with thanks to God for having so wonderfully given strength to his heart.

As the number of his disciples at this time had reached to twelve thousand, and as the

wall that separated him from his wife thereby crumbled, he went back to her. As he came to the door of his house he heard a strange woman say to his wife, "Are you happy that your husband is returning after having acquired twelve thousand disciples?"

"I should be still happier," answered his wife, "if he returned with twenty-four thousand."

And Rabbi Akiba did not open the door of his house, nor did he go in to his wife. Once again he imposed upon himself separation from his mate, and erected a new wall about himself, with a vow that he should not approach his wife until he acquired four and twenty thousand disciples. And again he left, to wander through cities and lands, to spread the word of God and assemble disciples.

From now on he became more severe than ever in his religious demands, and his condemnations grew harsher. One who, like him, had triumphed over such great temptations, had full right to demand similar continence and will-

power on the part of others. And he was wont to mock, jeer and jest at all who committed a sin.

He had forgotten the saying: "Believe not thyself until the day of thy death." And in Heaven it was decreed that he should be reminded of it.

One day his travels led him to a beautiful spot, through woods and fields. It was a wonderful day. The sun, midway in the sky, did not burn, but laughed and sang of the splendour of existence, pouring out joy upon the entire land, upon wood and field, upon tree and grass. All the birds and beasts and insects laughed and sang together with it. Rabbi Akiba, filled with the great gladness, forgot the passage of the Torah that was running through his mind and across his lips but a moment before, and could not remove his glance from the sunny splendours that surrounded him.

Suddenly it seemed as if some one had thrust him backward. But it was nobody. It was

his own blood, and the blow that he had felt was the throb of his own heart.

Were not his eyes deceiving him? He opened them wide and looked again, intently.

No. His eyes saw clearly. A wondrously beautiful naked girl at the top of a palm tree.

He could not believe his eyes, but there was the girl looking down at him, smiling at him so enticingly, intoxicating him with the pearly whiteness of her teeth.

She was so beautiful and entrancing that the sun had forgot its wedding-procession. It had stopped in its path—this shining star—and had enfolded the maiden's naked body in its rays, colouring it a rosy red and filling its veins with red wine.

Rabbi Akiba, too, stopped in his path, unable to move from the spot, unable to tear himself away from the dazzling vision. His heart palpitated, his body burned, his tongue became dry. He stood dumbfounded, and could not himself hear how he barely managed to utter, "Who are you?"

And the vision upon the tree laughed seductively down to him.

"Come up and I will tell you."

"What are you doing there?"

"Come up, and you shall see."

"Are you gathering dates?"

"What need have I of them? I feed myself and feed others with my own sweetness. Do you not wish to taste it?"

"Why are you naked?"

"So that the sunbeams may enjoy me, and the wind, and the hills, and the valleys, and the heavens, and God."

"How can you lie there so?"

"I have a couch here made of leaves and branches,—a soft couch for me and for those whom I invite to enjoy me. Soft is my bed and fragrant,—but even softer and more fragrant am I. Will you not feel us?"

And in utter forgetfulness, filled with a single intense desire, Rabbi Akiba approached very close to the tree and scarcely had breath to ask, "How can I get to you?"

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The glorious vision uttered a magic laugh.

"Were you, then, never a little boy? What did you do when a tempting apple nodded to you from among the branches of an apple-tree? You removed your clothes, made yourself as light as possible, and climbed up the tree after the beautiful, ripening fruit. Am I less than the fruit? Is it not worth while to climb up after me? Or are you old, and have your bones become hard, and is climbing now beyond your years and your strength? Take off your clothes; you will have no need of them in any case, up here. Make yourself light, and with all the youth that has now been born anew in you, climb up to me. . . ."

Enchanted and intoxicated, as hastily as possible, whipped on by driving impatience, Rabbi Akiba cast off his clothes and seized the trunk of the palm-tree, beginning to climb aloft. With his naked hands and feet around the shaggy bark, with his burning eyes riveted upon her above, drinking in her beauty, sucking in the warm ruddiness of her veins. He did not

notice that his skin was being scratched and torn by the bark of the tree, and that blood was beginning to flow over his body. He climbed higher, ever higher.

And her magic eyes drew him on as if with ropes and her fascinating voice was as a guide to him. From between her pearly teeth it poured forth like wine that robbed the senses.

"Come! Co-o-ome! Co-o-ome!"

But when he had climbed half the height of the palm he suddenly came to himself. It was as if a cold wind had icily bedewed him and had blown something away from before his eyes, making him see the complete ludicrousness and unworthiness of his position. He, the renowned Master, teacher and judge among the Jews, climbing, half-naked, up a tall tree, driven and goaded on by lust! He threw himself down, rather than descended, from the tree, rolled himself into a ball at its foot, and burst into bitter tears.

A malicious, mocking voice spoke above him:

"Had it not been decreed in Heaven that you

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and your Torah should be protected, your life at this moment would not be worth a straw."

Rabbi Akiba wept more bitterly than ever, striking his breasts and beating his head.

He dressed and continued on his way. The sun no longer shone; heaven and earth were veiled in greyish fog, and the laughter and song of the surrounding scene now ceased. Or perhaps it merely seemed so to him because his heart was bitter and his soul grieved; he looked neither to right nor to left and his ears were deaf to the outer world.

He felt ashamed and debased. And he knew that henceforth he would not mock those who had committed sin.

Now he understood the weakness of man, and how plentifully life was strewn with dangers, and his lips muttered acridly, "All of us here below are even as criminals who are released on bail, and a net of transgression is spread over all existence."

JOHANĀN THE HIGH PRIEST

JOHANAN THE HIGH PRIEST

I

JOHANAN the High Priest was eighty years of age. Sound in spirit and strong in body had he attained to that ripe old age, at one with himself and his God. For from his earliest childhood days he had been taught to walk upon the Lord's ways, nor did he forsake them. He guarded himself against all transgression, and he built around him one wall within another. To the old commandments he added new, and was strict with himself in fulfilling them. His words were: "The body is nothing, the soul is all. The body is dust and clay, the soul is eternity. Live not for your bodies, live for your soul alone. Heed not what time brings forth; turn all your thoughts and your efforts to the everlasting."

And as he preached, so did he live. Word and deed were to him the same. And although he was High Priest,—the leader of his people and the wealthiest and mightiest of his brethren,—his body knew nothing of the pleasures of this world.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, however, revered him greatly for his steadfast consistency. Although it was very difficult to follow in his footsteps, and very few did so, his entire people could not cease to marvel at him, and their admiration rose to reverence and veneration.

And because he was so beloved and respected, his eightieth birthday became a holiday for all the city. Every house was beautifully bedecked, and all the inhabitants dressed in festive array; from every corner of the land men and women in holiday mood made pilgrimages to him, riding thither or coming on foot. And there came to him from afar and near his friends and admirers, with music and song, asking him to walk with them through the streets

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of Jerusalem. Let him see how the whole people rejoiced in his longevity; let him feel how beloved he was. The road was laid with carpets, and little children ran ahead strewing his path with flowers and crying, "Life everlasting to our master the High Priest!" All the streets were packed with festive crowds, men and women; all the roofs were thronged with denizens of Jerusalem; every window was besieged, and the city resounded with the cry, "Life everlasting to our master the High Priest!" And the fair daughters of Zion, with graceful gestures and virtuous blushes, showered him with flowers and wreaths.

And as he passed thus through the streets of Jerusalem, amid the jubilation of the people, he heard behind him the voice of a woman, saying, "How handsome is the old man, and how strong he still is! A girl could fall in love with him!" And because his heart was filled with pleasure and forbearance, he turned his face toward the gossiping woman, with a fatherly smile upon his face. It was a young maiden, as beautiful

as a picture, of medium build and buxom presence, and she received his glance with eyes out of which beamed the sun. It was as if she had been waiting for him to look upon her, reserving for him her most penetrating glance. He was abashed at her look, and the genial, fatherly smile upon his lips faded into embarrassment, not knowing what to do with itself and at last lengthening to a grimace.

And as he turned his head away from her he heard the voice of a man, saying, "What has he had, pray, of all his long life, his beauty and his strength?" The voice came from the vicinity of the beautiful woman, and in it echoed a certain insolence, as if the speaker had meant to strike him and hurt him with the words. And yet there was deep pity in the voice. And it seemed to the aged High Priest as if an arrow had grazed his breast. He rose to his full height, the smile vanished entirely from his lips, his forehead became wrinkled and his countenance grew dark.

His assistant, the vice High Priest, who

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walked beside him, noticed the change that had come over the sage's face, and whispered to him, angrily, "That is Jason, the son of Mes-hulem, and the woman at his side is his sweetheart, Athaliah."

Johanan, however, affected not to hear what his subordinate whispered to him. He raised his head proudly and walked with firmer tread than before. His entire exterior bore the answer to Jason's words. His countenance grew stern and the look in his eyes sharp. Every moment spoke of his strength and of the consciousness that he had nothing to regret in his life. Jason understood this mute reply and smiled back ironically yet sadly, but all the people looked with great veneration upon the proud, giant-strong figure of the High Priest. They made way for him with trembling in their hearts; piety and reverence echoed in their incessant cries of "Life everlasting to our master, the High Priest!"

His proud bearing did not forsake him during all the time that he walked through the

streets, nor even later, as he sat with his intimate friends at the banquet given in his honour.

II

That night, however, the High Priest could not fall asleep. The small quantity of wine that he had permitted himself to drink at the table and the excitement kept sleep away from him. A confusion of human figures and dwellings and streets passed before his eyes; his ears buzzed with the endless hum of voices and instruments. But soon, from all the figures emerged that of Athaliah, and he could hear distinctly what she said and what Jason replied. At first it came to him unawares, like a dim remembrance, a slight impression. At once, however, the sight and the voice grew clear to him, and he became uneasy. He scowled angrily, as if trying to banish form and voice, and soon he began to toss from side to side. In vain! Athaliah stood before him, with her eyes that beamed with the sun transfixing him with her penetrating glance. He

experienced a sensation that had come to his body many a time during his life,—one that he always feared as much as deadly sin, trying to drive it from him by his strong will, long prayers and severe fasting.

His being cried within him: he, he the octogenarian! How does he come to this? He raged against himself and thought of himself with scorn. Eighty years old and a High Priest! He directed his thoughts to God; his lips began to whisper a prayer. Yet the great crowds continued to pass before his eyes, and from the multitude, clear and well-defined, there stood out Jason's sweetheart, the wonderfully beautiful Athaliah. Impossible to drive her from his thoughts! Impossible!

Suddenly Jason's words caused his blood to boil. A curse upon the wretch's mouth! What had he had of all his long life, his beauty and his strength! He had devoted these to God! God had given them to him and he was God's debtor, and he had paid back God like an honest man. His life was God's, and he

lived for God. Whoever lived otherwise was a wicked man, a sinner against God, a debtor that evades his debts.

These thoughts made him strong. It was as if his muscles had become iron and his veins, steel.

But despite everything, Athaliah's image did not disappear. She stood before him in all her beauty, with her radiant eyes, and that glance which penetrated into his bones and his very brain. He looked at her with ire and scorn; he even spat in disgust. All this was of no avail to banish the vision.

He lay calm, free of thoughts, and pretending to see nothing. His scorn of the feminine form knew no bounds. Soon, however, he arose and lighted a candle. The light must surely banish the evil vision. Seated on the side of the bed, his bare feet resting on the cold earth, he began to murmur a prayer. He was angry, utterly broken in body and soul. How came this to him, the aged man? Woe, woe, he had

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not lived righteously after all. The bodily, the fleshly, the sinful, still ruled over him.

He arose and stretched himself. Something now grew clear to him. As long as the soul dwells in the body, it must wage strife against the body. Thus was God's will. And he would give battle! His will was strong. He even stamped his foot. Yes, his will was strong!

And on that night he did not return to his bed. He unrolled the Torah in the light of the candle and sat down to study. He knew that the form of the beautiful woman had not yet vanished. He needed but to close his eyes and he could see her. He needed but to turn his head away from the sacred scroll and he would behold her, feel her presence distinctly. But he was calm. He knew that he would conquer in the struggle with the vision, which came from the Evil One. She would disappear. And his voice, as it intoned the holy passages, was touching.

III

The following morning he went into the wilderness, into the desert of Judea. He said that he desired to be all alone after the excitement of the previous day; far from human beings and his own affairs he wished to take account of his deeds: it was already high time he did so, for he was very old. He went into the desert, however, in reality to fast and to torture his body in combat against a desire that comes from Satan. He went barefoot over the burning sand, on jagged rocks and through thorns, under the scorching rays of a July sun, without food or drink, granting himself no rest. Yet the beautiful Athaliah hovered still before him and behind. Many a time he cast himself to earth, groaning frightfully. Not from fatigue, not from hunger or thirst, however, but from despair. Why did she not disappear? He beat his heart and tore at his breasts. "Lord God, why drivest Thou not from me this visitation from Satan!"

But he little knew what was still in store for him. When, that evening, after a meal of figs and water, he lay down upon hard stones, in a rocky hollow, tired, despairing, wracked by a burning desire for the beautiful Athaliah, a terrible thought assailed him. It came altogether unexpectedly, like an enemy from behind concealment.

What had he had of all his years, his beauty and his strength?

These were Jason's words, but the High Priest no longer knew it. The thought came to him so overwhelmingly that he groaned and commenced to tremble, as if he were exposed upon the snow-capped summit of Mount Lebanon.

He no longer remembered what he had thought the previous night upon his bed,—what had then made him so strong. One thought alone kept gnawing at him incessantly: "What have I had of all my life, of my beauty and my strength?" He even cried to God: "Lord,

what have I had of all my life, of my beauty, and my strength?"

Under the stress of unfulfilled passion his entire life seemed to him now like a desert. Harsh and ascetic, thorns and stones. Nothing but debts and debts paid. The body had been nothing; the soul all. The soul! Who was it crying so within him now? Who was longing within him now? Was it the soul or the body?

His head sank back and he lay weary and hopeless. All at once he started up. With frightened eyes he gazed before him and delved into his soul: How did he know that the truth had been with him,—that his life had been the true life ordained by God?

He stretched himself out upon his stomach, his chin propped on his hands, his eyes staring into the desolate night, burrowing, burrowing into his soul. Somewhere in the distance jackals were howling; a lion of the desert belowed with hunger. Johanan heard nothing. He was cold, and his heart and soul were rent asunder by bloody claws. The entire people

lived altogether differently from him. Were they all wicked sinners, and was he alone the righteous man? But there was no righteous man upon earth who had never sinned. What was sin? They had often ridiculed his severity, crying out against it. Had he really been too severe? Where was the proper boundary?

He looked up to the sky. He half expected that the heavens would now open and that he would behold God and hear Him. Then he would know the whole truth. God would reveal to him everything. To him alone. He did not remove his eyes from heaven, and a yearning enfolded him. He longed to see God, to hear Him. He was eighty years old, and for the greater part of his life had been a High Priest, yet God had never revealed Himself to him either in reality or in a dream. What he knew, he knew from others, those who had come before him. From Moses and the Prophets. And, too, from himself alone,—from what his heart had told him. But now he wanted to hear it from God's own lips. Had

he, then, not earned it? But hour after hour went by, yet the heavens parted not, nor did God reveal Himself. The stars twinkled peacefully in the high heavens and from afar came the howling of the jackals and the roaring of a lion.

He cast his face upon his arm and burst into tears. Like a petulant child; and like a child, too, he fell asleep in his tears.

His slumber was restless and short. Queer dreams wove and interwove themselves in his mind, and on waking he could not recall them. And he knew that not even in his dreams had God revealed Himself. His heart became very heavy, and he accompanied his morning prayers with deep sobs. Athaliah's figure was as if veiled by a cloud; that which had driven him into the desert had disappeared and been forgotten. Now he had one great yearning: to experience a moment of revelation,—to hear God's voice, God's word. With sighs and tears he proceeded further into the desert, to torture his body with prayer and fasting. He

strode along in expectancy, his eyes directed to heaven, his ears wide open. Often he would stop short with bated breath, for it seemed to him that already he saw or heard something. Each time, however, after a brief waiting, he would continue on his way with a deep groan.

His prayers did not cease. "From the depths of my heart I call out to Thee, Oh God. Lord, hear my entreaty, and bend Thine ear to the voice of my supplications." And he discoursed learnedly with God. He believed in Moses and the Prophets. He knew for a surety that God had discovered Himself to them and had spoken to them. But if He spoke to these others and revealed his will, then why not to *him*? If he was unworthy of this grace, he wished to know why. If none might look upon God and remain thereafter alive, he did not care. He was ready to die. With all his heart he desired such a death. Almighty God, this very moment.

He stopped and waited. Sadly he then continued on his way. At last he began to call,

"God, if Thou Thyself desirest not to reveal Thyself unto me, then send me Thy messenger!"

But day after day passed by. He travelled the length and breadth of the desert; his body became cadaverous, his face sunken, and his weary, extinguished eyes sat in deep sockets.— Then he turned back to the city, which was much agitated by his disappearance, and where he was received with cries of fright and wringing of hands because of his wretched appearance. With still greater fright did they leave him, for he refused to reply to all questions; his mouth was sealed, his look severe and distant. His wife and children, and all his friends in the city went about distracted and in despair, for they could not tell what was the trouble with the aged High Priest. The only words he vouchsafed were addressed to the guardian of the keys, from whom he took the key to the Temple, admonishing him to permit none to follow the High Priest. The entire

city was plunged into deeper consternation than ever.

IV

Only once per year—on the Day of Atonement—was the High Priest permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, the most sacred room of God's house. Only this once, without being punished on the spot by a bolt from the Almighty. Yet it was to the Holy of Holies that Johanan now directed his steps. He desired to see God, and death held no terrors for him. His heart was embittered, his spirit downcast. He was not of God's chosen few. What mattered to him a continuance of life in unworthiness?

He prepared himself with ablutions and performance of sacrifice, and clothed himself in white. Before the entrance to the Holy of Holies he paused for a moment. In fear, but also in expectation: perhaps God would yet send him a token. It was everywhere so still, and the semi-darkness of the room in which he stood was as though peopled with spirits.

He looked in horror about him and his heart beat wildly. He did not retreat, however, nor did he desist from his firm purpose. With unbending will, yet with trembling hand, he opened the heavy door to the Holy of Holies, and dashed, rather than walked, into it. His eyes were as if dazzled, his legs sagged beneath him, his heart was almost rent. He leaned against the wall to keep from falling. He neither saw nor heard anything. He stood rooted in great terror.

Gradually he recovered his composure. How long had he been there? And he was still alive? His eyes opened wide with astonishment; he tore himself away from the wall and surveyed his surroundings. All was silent and calm in the dark solitude of the room. The Satijah stone, the Rock of the World, which stood there in place of the vanished Holy Ark, he felt rather than saw. Silence. A vast silence. He rolled his eyes about, listening intently. Nothing. Four bare walls, the Satijah Stone and he alone. And nothing else. He

cried aloud with amazement. And his present stupefaction was even greater than his previous terror. He straightened himself out, proud and arrogant. His countenance grew stern and ireful. He began, from force of habit, to go out with his back to the entrance and with his face to the Ark, but at once he wheeled about and with firm steps left the Holy of Holies and the Temple.

He went to Athaliah, the beloved of Jason, son of Meshulem.

She looked at him in surprise and fright. The High Priest in her home!

"I have come for your love," he said.

She screamed and recoiled from him with hand upraised to defend herself.

"I am handsome and strong and capable of inspiring a woman's passion. You yourself said so, and I have come for your love."

She tried to flee but firmly he barred her way.

"I have had nothing of all my life. Nothing of my beauty and strength. Your own Jason said so. Now I desire to enjoy what I have

missed as long as strength and beauty remain with me."

She wished to make an outcry, but her throat was as if tightened with fetters.

He embraced her with a powerful arm and she turned and writhed as though a snake were coiling about her.

And he spoke:

"I have come for your love. Are you afraid of me? Do I arouse your aversion? Am I too old for you? My white hair recalls the snowy cold of death. But I still live and am strong and passionate, and I have come for your love."

Athaliah, ghastly pale, squirmed in his arms and gasped, in fright and loathing. "Let me go! Let me go!"

But he took her in his arms and with his keen eyes seemed to devour her beauty.

"I'll have your love. You shall have to belong to me. If not willingly, then by force. I am all-powerful; you know that. Your life is in my hands, and the life of your sweetheart,

and the life of all those near and dear to you."

Athaliah now regained her voice. "No! No!" she shrieked. "Kill *me!* Slay me alone!"

"You shall belong to me. I do not wish your death. I desire you in your living beauty. I am very wealthy,—the richest of all our people. I will clothe you in gold and silver, and bedeck you with precious stones. Ask what you wish and it shall be granted. Why do you fear me so? I am old in years, but strong in body, and I wish to enjoy that strength. Be mine and you shall never regret it."

His words, which echoed with gold, and his arm, which spoke of great masculine strength, changed Athaliah's mind. She became the mistress of the High Priest, but for a few days only. For a savage fury befell the High Priest; he desired to enjoy the pleasures of the senses more and more, and he changed his mistresses every day, intoxicated with lust and wine. Then, to the great horror of his people, he also took to drinking.

His wife, his children, and all those who were truly pious and decent, together with all to whom the honour of their people was very dear, tried with despair in their hearts to turn him from the terrible life he had begun to lead. They also tried to learn how all this had so suddenly come to him,—how he could so completely have forgotten God. But he did not speak to them; he was as one dumb. And it seemed that no invocation of God or the Torah could touch his heart or his ear.

And many who were not decent, and to whom the honour of their people was worth less than the smallest coin that fell into their purses, became his flatterers and pandered to his desires. For he was prodigal with his gold, and that was all they desired of him; the deeper he sank into lust and dissipation, the more gold came into their clutches.

Soon, however, his eighty years began to tell. He grew weak and impotent, but he could still guzzle and he became a disgust and a fright.

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The people felt that they must be freed of him, and his death was decided upon. They remembered, however, what he had been for eighty years and none cared to lay hands upon him. It was resolved that his death should be an honourable one, happening as if by accident. And once, on an evening in which he had drunk more than usual, he was abducted from his sycophants, taken into the mountains and left lying upon the brink of a precipice over a deep sea. No one's hand was lifted to thrust him over the edge, and with tears in their eyes and sad shakings of their heads they abandoned him to his fate.

He lay motionless, sunk in a deep sleep. But the first rays of the rising sun awakened him. He stretched out his arms as if to reach for the wine that stood now always before him. He grasped only the air. He groped and groped about and at last opened his eyes. He opened them wider and wider, distending them more and more. Where was he? He looked around, to this side and to that, above and be-

low. He saw the abyss. Slowly and gradually it dawned upon him that he lay upon the brink of a high precipice. How had he come hither? Who had brought him? Slowly and leisurely he looked over the edge. If he should fall in. . . . Then he understood. This was his death-sentence. He had been condemned to death and the hands of his judges were to remain clean. His blood boiled. He wished to arise at once, but he was not strong enough. He rolled his head about, thumped the earth with his fists, gnashed his teeth. Weary and utterly exhausted, he remained lying there and somewhat later began to gaze around him. Where on earth was he?

He beheld before him a large sea girded by green mountains. It looked like a huge cauldron, over which arose the queen of day, pure, youthful and flaming. From the mountain forests far and near there wafted up to her a thin blue mist. The earth was uncovering itself before the sun, receiving its beams with delight, shouting to her in radiant green. Quite near

to him there sparkled dazzlingly the snow-capped peak of Mount Lebanon, mischievously reflecting with all the colours of the rainbow its lance-like rays of the sun. And the calm, deep sea received into its bosom all the light of heaven and earth and redoubled their splendour.

Johanán lay and gazed without taking into account what he saw, but he was inundated with the surrounding splendour. And suddenly his lips began to murmur, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, Thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain."

Thus he murmured and his spirit was not with him. He did not know what issued from his lips. He repeated it several times. Always the same passages. "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and maj-

esty. . . ." And his heart became softer and softer.

Then he suddenly became aware of what he was saying and was startled. God's name upon his lips! He, full of God,—of God, against whom he had spoken, against whom he had rebelled so arrogantly! He burst into tears. Ever so softly, without the slightest sound, but his heart was torn, rent asunder. He was weeping over the last few weeks, over the wretched life he had been leading, and his subdued crying was filled with deep lamentation, filled with regret and repentance, yet his eyes did not turn from the great beauty and glory around him. It seemed to him that now, for the first time, he grasped that which all his life he had not known. He who creates such a wealth of beauty and splendour cannot be merely austere and harsh. And in his dejection he was consoled by the hope that God was good, merciful and loving.

He tried to arise, return to his people and tell them what he had there discovered, but his

strength abandoned him. Then he knew that his end had come. He was terrified. God! Anything but to be left lying there in the ugliness of death! But soon he composed himself. He began to murmur a prayer, opening his eyes wide in contemplation of God's beautiful world. And when he felt that his eyes were growing heavy, he made only a single movement—and he fell like lead into the deep waters. •

ZERÜBBABEL

ZERUBBABEL

I

IT came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus,— that Ahasuerus who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces. In the third year of his reign he waxed wroth against Vashti his wife, because she had once refused to do his bidding, and banished her from him. And after his wrath was appeased he regretted exceedingly what he had done and his heart was filled with yearning for Vashti. And his servants said, "Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king throughout all his provinces. And let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." And the plan pleased the king and he had it executed.

A Jewish youth dwelt in the city of Shushan,

and his name was Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel. He was descended from the royal house of David,—a grandchild of the last of the Jewish kings,—and royal was his mien. He was tall in build and broad-shouldered; in his deep black eyes shone the glance of a ruler, and the long black hair that flowed over his neck bore witness to his strength. Whoever saw him grew fond of him and was inspired with respect, and the Jews were proud of him. He recalled to them their independence, lost but a short time since, and awoke in them thoughts of a better, an independent future. And there was a young Jewish maiden in Shushan, and she was called Sheshana, and more than aught else Zerubbabel loved her. She was his comfort and his joy,—his solace in dark moments and his rest after hard labour. Small she was, and tender, with white face and black tresses. Her whole soul was revealed in the dark eyes under the black silken strands of her lashes; a soul that was loveliness itself. Her laughter was clear and sparkling, and caressed

the ears of her hearers, like silks from Damascus. Her mouth was ever open with laughter, and through her half-parted lips there glistened wonderfully white small teeth.

And it happened that when Ahasuerus commanded to appear before him all the fair daughters of his subjects, so that he might choose a wife from among them to replace Vashti, Zerubbabel knew that Sheshana would be the chosen one. So he concealed her in a place where the king's servants would not be able to discover her, and did not leave her side, like a lion ready to pounce upon any one who should stretch out his hand to her.

But first he said: "You are beautiful, Sheshana, and there is none under the sun to equal you. You are the fairest of all Judea's daughters and in vain will they seek among other tribes for another like you. A glance from you is the sweetest of sensations, and a kiss from your lips is eternity. Your body is like the breath of a sweet flower; happy and blessed is he who may enjoy it. Can it be, Sheshana—

tell me—that you wish to be taken before the king? And it will come about that when Ahasuerus beholds you, he will sink to his knees before you, as if the goddess Astaroth had appeared before him in her fairest form. And you will become the wife of the king,—reigning as queen from India even to Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces. Great and powerful will you become,—arbiter over the life and death of all the king's subjects, and all will tremble before you. Tell me, Sheshana, and I will free you at once. I myself will open the door for you. . . .”

But she did not allow him to finish, and lay her small white hand across his mouth. She snuggled close to him with her tender, flower-like body and rested her head upon his strong bosom; her voice became frightened and tearful.

“Why do you scare your Sheshana, you wicked Zerubbabel? Picture me death and annihilation, speak to me of slavery and heavy chains; tell me that I shall grow ugly,

with the face of a leper, and you will not frighten your Sheshana so much as with your talk of the king and his kingdom. How could you have spoken so? Tell me, how have I sinned to deserve it? Do you not yet know, then, how strong is my love for you? Tell me how to give you further proof of it and I will do so. Love speaks in various languages; have I not spoken to you in all of them? Have I not cooed to you like a dove, and have I not cried with passion's fiery tongues? Have I not laughed in your embraces with my clearest laughter, and have I not wept for ecstasy in the sweetness of my love? You wicked Zerubbabel, my only one! My love is now like a stricken dove; it has lowered its wings and cast down its weary head in deep mourning, and it is you who have wounded it!"

She pressed Zerubbabel tightly to her, and his heart shouted with delight. He did not interrupt her speech, and every word from her deep-red lips rendered his breathing more difficult. He was unable to speak; his breast

heaved; he drank in her love with his glowing eyes which were like an ocean that cannot be filled.

And Sheshana threw around his neck her bare white arms and whispered to him; her voice was like the voice of a distant violin.

"You are my king, and my kingdom is your love. It is greater and wealthier than that of Ahasuerus. The sun never sets upon my kingdom, and my rulership over it is unlimited. Your powerful bosom is my firm land, and upon it I build my most glorious palaces. Your eyes are my seas; I sink into them even as the sinking sun, and like the rising sun I look out from them, and my world is bathed in splendour and in light. Your mighty arms are my armies, and I am secure beneath their protection. I desire no other kingdom, and the whole world without you would be too small and too forlorn. My beloved, my only one, my fortress and my sun, protect your Sheshana, guard well your queen!"

More tightly than ever she pressed Zerub-

babel to her, and his voice quivered with agitation, and yet it spoke of his great strength.

"Zerubbabel is with you, and woe unto him that dares stretch out his arm toward you, even though it be the king himself. But speak to me, Sheshana, speak to me, my glorious maiden. Open up Paradise to me with your words, and I become the god who dwells therein. Coo to me, my little dove, and fill my heart with blessedness."

And Sheshana laughed with her clearest laughter, whispering then, "Small is Sheshana, but great is her love, boundless as the sea. But Sheshana asks for reward, and she languishes for a kiss!"

Zerubbabel clasped her to him with fiery passion; more fiery still was his kiss. For a long time he did not remove his lips from her own, and it was as if in that kiss he lived out his entire life. Again and again they united in their kisses, and Sheshana laughed with her clearest laughter. All at once she threw back her head and raised to his eyes her enchanting

glance; playful and infinitely sweet was her voice. "And what would Zerubbabel do if Sheshana were to go off to King Ahasuerus?"

Zerubbabel felt a tremor in all his limbs, and he closed his eyes. Soon he opened them and his glance had become sinister. He embraced her firmly, as if to shield her so that none might take her away; his voice was hard. "I know a huge cliff, high above a deep abyss. Upon that cliff would Zerubbabel climb, and up there would he cry out his infinite grief. And the rock would crumble to dust from his cries and would disappear into the abyss with Zerubbabel."

Now Sheshana felt a tremor in all her limbs; her countenance blanched and her lips could scarcely move. "Forgive me, dear, for having spoken thus." And Zerubbabel clasped her to him with all the strength of his passion; his eyes burned; he pressed his fiery kiss upon her lips. "You are mine, mine alone, for all eternity!"

II.

According to the tale, King Ahasuerus selected as his wife Esther, the cousin and foster-daughter of Mordecai, the son of Jair. And Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Aggagite, became the favourite of King Ahasuerus, who set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed and revered Haman. Except Mordecai. This angered the son of Hammedatha, and his heart was filled with wrath. But he scorned to wreak vengeance on Mordecai alone. His rage was like a sea that overflows its shores; in this sea he desired to drown and destroy the entire Jewish people. Then he came before the king and asked of him permission to annihilate the Jews. He offered ten thousand talents of silver and spoke plain words.

"There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom. And their laws

are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." This was poison in the king's ears,—poison in his heart, and he even renounced the money. He took his ring from his hand and gave it to the Aggagite to do with the Jews as his heart desired. Whereupon Haman issued a decree in the name of the king, sealed with the king's ring, to all the hundred and seven and twenty provinces of King Ahasuerus, to destroy, to kill and cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, upon the thirteenth of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

The Jews learned of all that had been planned and a great terror descended upon them; their fright knew no bounds. They raised a loud and bitter cry, rent the clothes upon them and put on sackcloth with ashes. They sought counsel but found it not. Who would save them from certain death? Where should they turn and whither should they go? Where could they hide and whither might they

flee? In their great terror and in their great misfortune they raised their eyes to Queen Esther. Esther must help them,—Esther, the Jewish daughter upon the royal throne. And Mordecai, her cousin, turned to her, asking that she go to the king and make supplication to him for her people. Esther could not make up her mind, because whosoever came unbidden before the king was put at once to death, and she had not been summoned to him for thirty days.

Mordecai sent sharp words to her.

“Think not that you of all the Jews will escape because you are in the king’s house. For if you altogether hold your peace, then shall help and deliverance come to the Jews from another place; but you and your father’s house shall be destroyed; and who knows but that you ascended to royal power for just such a time as this?”

Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer:

“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither

eat nor drink three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and then will I go in to the king, despite the law. And if I perish, I perish." Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. The Jews assembled in their meeting-house in Shushan, weeping, fasting, wailing and hoping in Esther. And when any one opened the door and came in, he was greeted with tear-stifled voices: "What says Esther? What does Esther? What news of Esther?"

III

But Zerubbabel, when he learned of Haman's decree, neither rent his garments nor covered his head with ashes. His locks spread even more spiritedly over his neck and his eyes blazed with a wild wrath. His hands rolled up into iron fists and he fluttered them in the air like the wings of an eagle. He raised his voice, and it was like the voice of thunder.

"Oh, they shall regret it! The Jewish

people is to them a shattered heap, easy to destroy and to annihilate, a mob without rights, to whom each may do as he pleases. But they will learn that it is not as they have imagined. They will pay too dearly for every Jewish life, and our defeat will be their greatest disaster. They shall regret it! They shall regret it!"

And as he spoke with head raised proudly erect, waving fists that had hardened to steel and iron, there arrived a messenger, bringing him report of the conversation between Mordecai and Esther and calling him to the meeting-house, where all Jews were beginning to assemble, to fast for Esther three days and three nights. Zerubbabel's eyes lighted up with fury and he said to the messenger, "Go tell him who sent you that the fate of a people cannot depend upon a woman and the extent to which she pleases her husband. Go tell him that now is no time for fasting and weeping. With weapons in their hands will they destroy the Jews; with weapons in their hands must the Jews make their stand." And to those

near him he turned, saying, "You have heard what I said. Go and spread it among the people, that thus spoke Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel the son of Jehoiachim, King of Jerusalem: 'Let them gather in the meeting-house if they will; not to fast or weep, however, but to consider means of defence.' "

But those about him did not obey him willingly, and one of them said, "Let us wait and see what Esther can do." Zerubbabel grew red with anger and cried to the speaker, "One can see that you are the son of a servant and your soul is the soul of a born slave. Out of my sight and let me never see you again!" And his messengers departed from him to spread his words among the people, doing so, however, with shrugging of the shoulders and hidden laughter. And Zerubbabel arose and himself went to the meeting-house, to summon the Jews to battle and self-defence. On the way thither he visited many houses, finding in the majority of them only women and children or aged and infirm persons who could not move their limbs,

For all the men, young and old, who possessed any strength in their loins, were gathered in the meeting-place. And everywhere he went he found tears and despair,—sackcloth upon their bodies and ashes upon the heads. And everywhere he went he was greeted with the same wailing, stammered question: What was Esther doing? Did he not have news of her? Or hadn't the king summoned Esther to him? And when he began to speak of battle and self-defence he was looked upon as if he spoke an unknown language.

One very old man said to him, with lips that scarcely could move and in a voice barely audible, "You speak of resistance and self-defence. Young man, I knew your grandfather Jehoiachim and your granduncle Zedekiah. ~~They~~, too, gave battle and raised their heads against Nebuchadnezzar, and the result was our exile. No, my young man, summon not to battle and self-defence. We must fast, only fast, and Queen Esther will come to our rescue." And Zerubbabel realised that as the old man spoke,

so spoke all his people, and he departed for the meeting-house, with lowered head and lagging step.

IV

Zerubbabel stopped upon the threshold of the meeting-house and surveyed the great assembly. And when he saw the men with tear-stained eyes and with their hands upon their heads, his eyes flashed and his lips turned white with scorn and ire. He was surrounded by the crowd, the old men pressing close to him and the young men in the rear.

"What have you brought us, Zerubbabel?" the old men asked. "Open your lips and tell us what news of Esther and what do you know of her?"

The questions were to his anger like oil upon flames, and he opened his mouth to speak harsh words. "Why do you ask me of Esther? What do you wish, you greybeards, of that woman? And what shall I tell you of her?—Am I, then, her sweetheart, and shall I tell you

of her beauty,—the sweetness of her body and the charm of her love?"

The assembly gaped at him in stupefaction, and the elders spoke again to him: "What has come over you, Zerubbabel, and what have you on your heart? You are wroth and speak harsh words to us. Or can it be that you do not know what has happened? That a great disaster impends over the Jews,—complete annihilation? And who can help us if not Queer Esther? Or do you know another aid? Speak, and we will hear."

Zerubbabel rose to his full height; his eyes lighted up, and his voice was as hard as steel and iron. "Yes, I know another aid, and I have come to tell it to you. It lies *within you*,—in your courage and in your arms!"

His hearers received his words, mouths agape with surprise and astonishment; Zerubbabel spoke further and his voice throbbed with warmth. "Why do you eye me so? Or can you have misunderstood me? Your salvation lies in you alone,—in your courage and in

your arms. Why have you so yielded to despair? And why have you covered yourselves with ashes; wherefore your fasting? Are you weakening your bodies so as to make the work of your enemies all the more easy? I tell you, rather arm yourselves. Gird your loins and strengthen your muscles. Instead of wringing your hands over your heads and despairing, learn how to brandish a sword; instead of blinding your eyes with tears, teach them to aim an arrow. Be not like sheep who are easily led to the slaughter, but like lions that stand forth against their pursuers. It is only a game for one to seize a sheep and kill it, but the heart of the lion-hunter trembles, and only one out of a thousand can hunt lions. You sit and weep and fast and torture yourselves, and our enemies will mock and laugh. 'We need not whet our swords,' they will say. 'With our dog-whips we'll be able to strike dead the starved and terrified Jews.' And they will praise Haman for the permission he secured from the king and must even now be rejoicing

beforehand over the Jewish property that will so easily be surrendered to them. But if they learn that you propose to make a bold, heroic stand against them,—that your hands are skilled in wielding the sword and your eyes trained to direct the dart, they will look upon you with respect and admiration. They will no longer laugh or mock, but will consider the matter well. And they will say, ‘We have permission from Haman, but who will provide for our widows and orphans in case we fall at the hands of the Jews?’ ”

When he had spoken thus and more, the elders shook their heads and the youths looked at the ground in embarrassment. At last the old men could restrain themselves no longer and broke in upon his speech. And they said, “You are young in years, Zerubbabel, and speak according to your years.”

Zerubbabel, however, interrupted them and his voice echoed with scorn. “I am young in years! How could I have failed to foresee that such would be your answer! I am young

in years! But of what avail are your grey hairs, when you, too, are at a loss for counsel and place your hopes upon a woman's undergarment? I am young in years! But young in years and even younger than I was my grandfather David, yet he delivered the Jewish people from Goliath. Just as you here, now, so then, too, your men were in despair. They were frightened and trembling and knew not whither to turn for help. Then came young David and brought them salvation. Young in years, but he knew that a little stone, well aimed and well delivered, was more effective than fasting, more powerful than tears. Therefore I say to you, why do you reckon my years for me? See, I bring you deliverance. Be not like women,—'cry babies' who begin to weep at whatever happens to them. Be men, who feel the strength of their arms and the power of their loins. Come, let us cry out a manifesto in the streets: 'Haman has purchased the Jewish people and given it over to annihilation, but the Jewish people is not an object to be bought

and sold, nor will it accept its destruction idly. The Jews have armed themselves and they are being trained for battle. And when their enemies fall upon them to kill and wipe them out, they will defend themselves even as the lioness defends her cubs, and for every Jew that perishes ten of his opponents will forfeit their lives. Come, let us make public this manifesto and you will see how much longer the countenances of our opponents become and how downcast they will look. Cast off your sackcloth, I tell you; wipe off your ashes and straighten out your shoulders. Gird your loins and take double-edged swords in your hands. And you will see that aid will come to you, and your blessing will fall upon Zerubbabel."

His countenance blazed like a torch and he looked upon the assembly with the eyes of a leader. But all eyes were turned away from him and the elders shook their heads. At this moment the door opened and Mordecai entered. All rushed toward the newcomer, surrounding him and showering him with their questions.

"What says Esther?"

"What does Esther?"

"What news of Esther?"

V

And Mordecai, the son of Jair, was garbed in sackcloth and ashes. His forehead was furrowed with deep wrinkles and his eyes were careworn. It was easily to be seen that many thoughts weighed upon his mind. He opened his lips and answered the questioners. "There is no news from Esther. And what would you hear from her? Do you not know that she asked for three days, and that this is only the first?"

All the assembled hearers bowed their heads in mourning and wiped their eyes. And when Modecai, with a deep sigh, sank upon a bench, the entire house resounded with sighs and groans from all hearts.

Zerubbabel stood alone; none looked upon him. His heart was bitter to the point of crying out, and he would gladly have struck to right

and to left with his fists; he relieved his mood with a wild outburst of laughter. All eyes were directed to him in astonishment, and Mordecai spoke. "Zerubbabel, arrayed in his finest clothes, laughs with such incisive laughter.—What ails him?"

Those about Mordecai stepped back, as if to open a path for Zerubbabel, that he might approach Mordecai. Zerubbabel, however, did not stir from his place. Brimming over with scorn and bitterness he cried, "Tell him what ails me!" In a few words they repeated the tenor of Zerubbabel's speech, saying that he summoned his people to battle and counselled them not to place their faith in Esther.

Mordecai raised his glance to Zerubbabel; both men eyed each other like two enemies measuring each other's strength. Then Mordecai spoke, emphasising every word. "In every age there are certain persons who imagine that the easiest way to break a wall is with one's head."

Zerubbabel answered with aversion and

mockery. "But not every age has the misfortune to possess a leader with the timidity of a weak woman, who can only raise his hands to his head and cry bitterly!"

The gathering turned its glances from Mordecai to Zerubbabel and from Zerubbabel to Mordecai. It was as if two gladiators had stepped forth into the arena to wrestle and seek victory. And the onlookers became entirely absorbed in the scene about to take place, forgetting their great misfortune. Yet they crowded more closely about Mordecai, as though expecting protection from him against Zerubbabel.

Mordecai felt that all were with him and none was with Zerubbabel, so he uttered cutting words. "Better a weak old woman as a leader than a madman who inspires to impossibilities. The weakest of women may prevent a calamity, but the most insignificant madman can bring down upon his people the most grievous of disasters. I do not desire to insult you, Zerubbabel, but what you counsel is sheer madness."

Zerubbabel replied bitterly: "Woe unto the people to whom it is preached that self-defence is madness, and greater woe still unto the people among whom such preachment finds ready ears. Such a people is a heap of dead bones, from which all signs of life have fled."

Mordecai interrupted him with a calm, self-confident voice. "Who says that self-defence is madness? Am I not, then, for self-defence? Do I desire, then, that we exterminate ourselves before the enemy attacks us? Do I wish, indeed, that we cease to be? Do I not yearn to rescue our people? Let our people defend itself; but the means of self-defence are various, and your way, Zerubbabel, is folly."

Zerubbabel stood there, looking at Mordecai as if he had not understood, and he asked, in great surprise, with a quivering voice, "How long has the self-defence of a people meant the pretty face of a young woman? Is Esther's body our self-defence?"

Again Mordecai replied calmly and confidently. "You understand by self-defence

only the power of our arms, while I term self-defence the power of beauty and the power of money likewise. You are young, Zerubbabel, and surely you know the power of beauty. Say, is it not the surest way? The king's heart can be purchased for us with beauty, and Esther must do it. Is not Esther my uncle's daughter? Was she not to me even as my own child? Is she not the flesh and blood of all of us? And yet we told her to risk her life and go unbidden to the king; and should her beauty not win the king and should she as a consequence be put to death, then we will choose still another Jewish daughter,—one even more beautiful. And even if we should have to sacrifice all our Jewish daughters and sisters and wives, we will do so, despite the great grief it will cause us and the heaviness of the blow. Is not that, too, self-defence? And when our beauty has proved unsuccessful, we will defend ourselves with our money, with our possessions. Haman purchased us with ten thousand silver talents; then we can buy ourselves free for twenty,

thirty, forty. From time immemorial these have been the surest means of self-defence. Was not our father Jacob freed from his brother Esau by his possessions? Did not also your great-great-grandfather, King Asa, save himself from Baasha, King of Israel, through bribing Benhadad, King of Aram? And did not Judith with her beauty rescue the Jews from Holofernes? *Your* self-defence, on the contrary, is self-destruction. Small and few are we among the peoples of the hundred and seven and twenty provinces. Who will fear our weapons? Who will be impressed by our arms? And it may come ~~to~~ pass, moreover, that if the king learns that Jews are arming themselves, he will send against us his powerful army, trained in warfare; and there will not be a vestige left of our people. Would you have it thus, Zerubbabel?"

Zerubbabel made answer in loud and bitter tones: "Shame upon you and upon all who side with you! Shame upon the whole Jewish people which beholds its salvation in money and

its self-defence in the beautiful bodies of its daughters! Now will I rend my garments and put on sackcloth and ashes! Now will I weep and wail my bitter lamentation! My people is dead! My people is a putrefying corpse. It is an abode only for worms, reptiles and insects. All living spirits have forsaken it. Where shall I find words to express my abhorrence? Where shall I find the thunder with which to boom forth my wrath? Judah, where are your warriors? Where are your heroes, Israel? Behold who your leaders are, and hear what they counsel! In their debasement they do not revolt against defiling their most sacred possessions, and the honour of their daughters is of less worth to them than the meanest life! Lion of yore, you have turned into a dog!"

Zerubbabel struggled for air and words failed him. He rent his garments and tore his hair, crying aloud and bitterly. He wrung his hands high above his head and kept repeating, "Shame upon them! Shame! Shame!" He left the

meeting-house, his legs wavering like those of a drunkard.

The men, gathered in the meeting-house, followed him with frightened, astonished looks, and not a mouth opened to speak a word. Only Mordecai smiled and quoted the popular saying, "Is that not correct? It is better to be a live dog than a dead lion."

The assembly, however, became as if something had defiled it and rendered it unclean. Yet none found in him the courage to follow Zerubbabel.

VI

Zerubbabel went in search of Sheshana, to pour out his heart to her and cry out his anger. He walked with rapid strides, looking neither to right nor to left, and groaned heavily: "What a grievous shame! What a deep disgrace!"

Impetuously he opened the door to Sheshana's house, and he felt that he would throw himself upon her bosom and wail out his im-

mense sorrow. He would bemoan his people, which he had lost,—his veneration of it, his belief in it, which had gone never to return. But when he beheld Sheshana he was rooted to the spot and his mouth could utter no sound. She was dressed in sackcloth; she was pale, her eyes red with much weeping, and her small form seemed even smaller and drawn. When she saw Zerubbabel she burst into loud crying as if she had long repressed it. Then, as she swallowed her tears, she spoke.

"You have come at last! At last you are here!—I thought that something had befallen you and I sent after you, but my messengers could not find you. They brought me the news, however, that you were safe and sound and that you were running about among the people, summoning them to armed resistance. I could not believe them and told them that they brought me lies. But one after another came to me with the same report and I was forced to believe it. The world became dark and dreary to me. Naughty Zerubbabel, how could you

forget me at such a terrible time? How could you leave me alone in an hour of peril? Don't you know that your Sheshana is a timorous maiden,—that her courage vanishes at the slightest danger? Oh, I am frightened to death! I am frightened to death!"

Zerubbabel stood as one transfixed; his eyes shone like glowing coals, his glance was stern and angry, and his voice was piercing. "You know what I have been doing, and yet you can speak to me in this manner? Zerubbabel went forth to rouse the Jewish people to self-defence, to armed resistance, and his Sheshana dressed herself in sackcloth and ashes and succumbed to fright! Can you be Sheshana? Can you be my sweetheart? Was not your heart flooded with courage, and did it not shout with jubilation because Zerubbabel was not among the cowards and the despairers?"

Sheshana continued to weep and kept repeating, "Oh, I am frightened to death! I am frightened to death!"

Zerubbabel shook his head and smiled cyni-

cally. "I thought I should find a solace in you,—a balm for my grieving heart. Sheshana will understand me and will side with me, I thought, and she will give me strength. But woe to my wretchedness that is so great! Sheshana greets me with tears, with petty fears and harsh words. And she has no ears for me,—no heart. . . ."

Sheshana, however, raised her head, pursing her lips with a surly grimace. "I can have neither ears for you nor a heart. For that which you desire is folly, and you are the butt of all men's mockery. 'Zerubbabel is a visionary,' they say,—a dreamer. He demands the impossible and utters dangerous things. He wishes to incite the scant Jewish people against the numberless enemy, and calls that self-defence. Why does he not preach, rather, that great and small, men and women,—all the Jewish people—shall cast itself into the rivers and streams that flow through the hundred and seven and twenty provinces?' That is what they are all saying, shaking their heads at men-

tion of you. And are they not right, and do they not speak with justice? Then how could I feel delight, and whence should joy have come to me? Because you forgot me, left me all alone and went in pursuit of dangerous dreams?"

Zerubbabel raised his voice and uttered sharp words. "If you had flayed my body with thorns and stung it with scorpions, you would not hurt me so much as your words have done. When all the mockers ridiculed me, my bosom was filled with anger and scorn, and I felt strong in my opposition. But when you joined the mockery and added your voice to the laughter, then I became the most unhappy, the most wretched man under heaven. You have become a stranger to me, Sheshana; with your words you have dug an abyss between us, and when Zerubbabel has lost Sheshana, he has lost his life."

With terror in her eyes the maiden cried, "Oh, how can you speak like that?"

As she looked at him with her horror-

stricken countenance and her flaming cheeks, Zerubbabel's heart was softened, and with a passionate impulse he rushed to her, clasping her to him with all his fire and tenderness. "My only one, my love," he whispered, "do not desert Zerubbabel. Do not mock me. Believe in me. Believe that I have *not* become demented and that I am *not* a mere dreamer. Believe that I have been born to great deeds, and I will accomplish them. I will declare war against the scoffers and misleaders of the people and will root them out. I will teach my people to be proud, and will lead it to victory. Be you the spring from which I shall drink strength for my bones and power for my veins. Pour courage into me and cheer my weary soul. Tell me that I am right and they who scoff at me are stricken with blindness. Tell me that you were mistaken and that for only a moment were you alienated from your Zerubbabel."

But Sheshana wept, hiding her face in her hands, and murmured, "I cannot! I cannot!"

With passion more intense than ever Zerub-

babel spoke to her. "See, they wish to buy themselves free of danger with the body of Esther. They send her to risk her life, and themselves they try to save with fasting. And if Esther's body avail not, they will have recourse to money, or the body of some other beautiful woman, or both these things together. Say, Sheshana, is this not despicable? Is it not base and cowardly? Everything within me cries out in revolt against it; does nothing cry out in you? Men—to send a woman's body before them! Sheshana, I have no words to express how contemptible that is! Do you feel it, Sheshana? Do you not feel as if you had been soiled, debased, spat upon? Sheshana, see how my muscles stiffen,—do you see my strength? I feel that my arms are giant wings ready to bear my people across every abyss and peril. Why do they fear to take up arms? Victory or Death, but no purchasing our security! Men who hide behind a woman have no sense of honour, and shall my whole people consist of such men? Shall Zerubbabel's people

lack a sense of honour? Does not your soul revolt against it all, Sheshana?"

But Sheshana lay quietly in his arms, speaking not a word. He clasped her still, looking passionately into her eyes and asking as before, "Tell me, Sheshana, tell me."

At last Sheshana whispered her reply: "You remain with me, and let them do as they deem best."

"To the shame and dishonour of the whole Jewish people!" exclaimed Zerubbabel, and a deep sadness suddenly came over him.

Then Sheshana spoke her tactless words: "They are in the majority, and they know what is for the best."

Zerubbabel recoiled as if a snake had bitten him. He was at first impelled to cry with bitter lamentations, but he felt a great anger surging within. He placed his hand on his heart and beat his breast, then all at once turned to the door. He remained before it, leaning heavily against it as he said, with a

hoarse voice, "You will never see me again, Sheshana!"

A tremor passed through her every limb; filled with fright and despair she cried out, "But, Zerubbabel!"

Again he murmured, "You will never see me again, Sheshana!"

Terrified, again she shrieked, "But, Zerubbabel!" She brought her white, shuddering hands to her cheeks and her glance was that of a frightened, stupefied dove.

Zerubbabel spoke with a quivering voice: "I love you, and my love is as strong as death. At night upon my couch I will call your name and my heart will languish with yearning. I will gash my body with the nails of my fingers and my eyes will burn under hot tears. But not *you* can be Zerubbabel's wife,—not *you* the mother of his children. You will never see me again, Sheshana!"

Sheshana's bosom heaved convulsively; her rapid breathing was choked with tears, and her shriek was heart-rending. "Zerrubbabel!"

But he had already opened the door, and standing upon the threshold he turned his face to the maiden and said, in firm accents, "Go and learn to be Zerubbabel's wife!" Then he closed the door behind him.

She screamed; it was the cry of a wounded deer. She rushed to the door, but her legs gave way beneath her. She stretched her hands out against the closed door, groaning and bemoaning her great misfortune. She could not speak. Her throat was as if clamped, and her tongue could not move. Only later was she able to whisper the name scarce audibly: "Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel!" Only his name could she murmur, and nothing more. Then she threw herself upon the bed, her hands pressed to her face, and her body in a heap, and it seemed to her as if some one had slapped her.

And Zerubbabel strode on through the night and the gloom, far beyond the city, into deep solitude, to the place where a huge cliff rose high above a deep abyss.

DRABKIN

A Novelette of Proletarian Life

DRABKIN

A Novelette of Proletarian Life

I

DRABKIN was an excellent workman,—a pocketbook maker whose handiwork was the talk of the town. Folks praised him in his presence and in his absence; he knew his worth and held his head proudly erect. It seemed to him that he had been created for the express purpose of speaking the truth to all employers right before their very faces, and upon the slightest provocation he would let them know that they were living off his sweat and blood,—that they were exploiters, bloodsuckers, cannibals, and so forth and so on. So that he never could find a steady place, and through the year he spent more days idle than at his employment.

The bosses pitied him. "He's a devil with claws," they would say. "May no good Jew know him! . . . But he has golden hands!"

"If it weren't for his crazy notions he'd be rolling in money. Such a workman! His fingers fly, as if by magic!"

Yet they could not suffer him in their shops. They even feared him. He was as widely known as a bad shilling, yet he was hired in the hope that perhaps he had changed for the better; perhaps he had calmed down and become quieter. Moreover, it was a pity to let a hand go around idle, when he could do more work in twelve hours than another could accomplish in twenty-four. But in a couple of days the employer would have to confess with a groan that Drabkin was the same insolent chap as ever, that it was dangerous to have him in a Jewish shop, because he would spoil the rest of the men. So he was shown the door.

He did not take this to heart. It had already become a game to him. He was certain

that the employers would finally be forced to come to him, because they needed him and must have him. For "his fingers fly, as if by magic." And he would simply smile in ironic fashion and pierce the bosses with a look that caused them to shiver in their boots.

"What? You don't like my ditty?" he would ask. "You're punishing me for telling the truth, ha? Exploiters! Vampires!"

"You ought to be put into prison, or into the madhouse," they would reply. "You're a dangerous character. You're a mad dog! . . ."

"Ah, ahem, tra-la!" he would mock, in delight. "But how do you like my work? I'm a fast worker, ha?"

And how this truthful boast cut the bosses!

"May your hands be paralysed!" they would answer. "If your character were only as good as your workmanship, you'd be rolling in money."

"Working for you people!" he would suddenly revert to his favourite theme. "With a fourteen-hour day at the wages you pay,

grass will soon be growing over my head. Exploiters! Vampires! Cannibals! . . ."

"There he goes again!" they would break in. "March! Off with you. Go shout it from the house-tops!"

"Ah, ahem, tra-la!" he would grunt again. "You don't like it? Wait! Just wait! . . ."

At the last words he would point a warning finger at them. Just what they were to wait for he himself did not know, but he had a feeling that something or other was bound to happen that would be not at all to the bosses' taste.

He would leave the employers triumphantly, his eyes beaming with happiness, as if he had just won a significant victory; with his glance, as he passed along the street, he would transfix every heavy paunched Jew who looked like an employer of labour. And his brain teemed with cutting remarks that he should have used and which he would be sure to employ in the very next encounter with those exploiters, those bloodsuckers, those cannibals. He saw himself surrounded by a host of toilers who raised

their eyes to him as their guardian and defender. His breast swelled with pride and self-confidence and he was contented with himself. . . .

"Jilted again!" was his jocular greeting to his landlady, a thin old woman, as he entered the house.

She looked at him in surprise. "From what gallows has he escaped in broad daylight?" she queried to herself.

"Fired again?" she scolded loudly, eyeing him with scorn. "The Lord protect us, what a man you are!"

She shook her head, as if she had long ago decided that he was a hopeless case; he was a good-for-nothing in the first place and a good-for-nothing he would remain. She turned away with a depreciatory curl of her lips. The wrinkles on her face, which was as dry and yellow as parchment, became even deeper.

"I gave them a bawling-out, all right!" he chuckled, while his eyes sparkled with joy.

"Much satisfaction that is!" replied the old

woman, sarcastically. "They must have taken it terribly to heart! Upon my word!"

"Such exploiters, — vampires, — cannibals. The world isn't enough for them!" he continued, unmindful of her words. "Do you think I'm going to be afraid of them? What? Do you imagine we're going to let them fatten on our sweat and blood, and look on in silence? Bah! Not a bit of it! I refuse to be silent! Such exploiters, cut-purses! I refuse to be silent! . . ."

"Psh! As bold as a Cossack!" she ridiculed. "But what satisfaction did you get? It was *you* who was chased out! You, with your 'sploiters' and your 'poiters'! . . ."

She was angry with the word, which she did not understand. She even thought that if it had not been for that word Drabkin would not have come to sorrow.

She was ready to spit contemptuously upon the floor and leave him. But Drabkin seized upon her last words.

"Chased out? Not so quick, my dear! They don't chase *me* out in a hurry!"

"They're afraid of you, I suppose!" she snarled. "I wouldn't let you cross my threshold!"

"Well, you see that they do!" he boasted.

"Wild man!" she commented in disgust.

"Aha!" was his victorious response.

After that "aha" the old woman spoke no more. She spat out in scorn, adjusted the scarf over her wig and walked away from him.

"'Sploiters, poiters.'" She continued to repeat the evil word to herself with anger.

II

BUT he was vied in an utterly different light by Chashke, the old woman's daughter.

When she returned at evening from work—she was a dressmaker—her mother met her with this greeting:

“He's sitting around idle again.”

And she nodded her head in the direction of Drabkin's room.

“Well, what of it?” asked the daughter, removing her cloak.

The old woman was taken aback by the girl's retort and was at a loss whether or not to reply. She was surprised that the news did not affect her daughter.

At this moment Drabkin came out of his room.

“I'm home again!” he announced, merrily.

"What's happened to you to-day?" asked Chashke.

"What's happened? 'What should happen? It happened! They're a pack of blood-suckers, exploiters, and that's all!" he exclaimed, hotly.

" 'Sploiters, poiters,' " interrupted the old woman, mockingly.

"But why should you have thrown up your job on this particular day?" asked Chashke, not heeding her mother's sarcasm.

"Why? Because!" he shouted. "Why! I can't look upon their actions in cold blood. It's inhuman! It's murderous! Ephraim is supposed to work till nine o'clock at night and he works till half past ten; when he came to work this morning at half past seven, they fell upon him like a mad dog and. . . ."

"Isn't it his granny's worry?" interjected the old woman.

"I can't bear such things. I can't look on in silence. So I gave it to them! . . ."

"Psh! Their shirts turned to linen! How they must have trembled before you!"

But Chashke cast an angry look at her mother.

"What then?" she asked, contemptuously: "Are the workingmen to suffer such things without a word of protest?"

"Let Ephraim holler for himself. Why need *he* do the shouting?" replied the old woman.

"And suppose Ephraim is a meek little lamb? And suppose Ephraim allows everybody to walk all over him?" cried Drabkin, springing to his feet, his countenance burning with indignation.

Chashke eyed her mother with ironic triumph.

"Then let him lie in the earth, let him rot, if he's such a fool," retorted the old woman.

"I can't hold my tongue when I see things like that," said Drabkin, his voice somewhat softer.

"Then you lie in the earth, too, and rot away, if you're such a fool!"

"But there's no need of cursing," interposed the daughter, angrily.

"Bah! You're no better than he is!"

"Don't you like it?"

But Drabkin would not permit matters to grow into a quarrel.

"I can't look on in silence . . ."

He launched into a discussion at the top of his voice. In the first place, Ephraim *was* really as meek as a lamb; you could do with him whatever you wished, and he would offer no remonstrance. In the second, he wasn't much of a workman, and if he were discharged from one place, he could not find another position in a hurry. So that he was simply afraid to talk back. But he, Drabkin! He couldn't see such doings and remain quiet! He had little reason to fear the bosses; he defied them,—the exploiters, the vampires! The world wasn't enough for them, they wanted more, more. . . .

And Chashke gazed at him with eyes brimful of love, agreed with everything he said, and experienced and felt the same thoughts and feelings as he.

Old Dina shook her head ironically.

"Two lunatics! One worse than the other! . . ."

III

DRABKIN and Chashke were considered sweethearts. "A love-affair," everybody would laugh. The bells rang, but it was no holiday, that is, it was merely a rumour.

Drabkin was a handsome fellow. Of medium build, broad-shouldered, a fair, round face framed in a little blonde beard; a medium-sized mouth with thin, blood-red lips, above which lay a thick moustache, a well-carved nose, a high, broad forehead and a round head covered with long, thick, dark brown hair. His dark grey eyes sparkled continuously. Young girls would fall in love with him at first sight. But he paid no attention to girls. He knew very few of them and had little to do with them. He was always absorbed in his "exploiters"; he was not even aware of Chashke's loving glances. He liked to talk with her, because

she sympathised with him. She understood him and agreed with him. He could talk and talk with her forever, without getting weary. But marriage was far from his thoughts—

Chashke, too, was a beautiful girl.

“If my Chashke should put on fine clothes,” the old woman would say, “you couldn’t look into her face any more than you can look straight into the sun.” Of course she exaggerated a trifle, just like a mother, but by no means did she lie when she spoke thus. Chashke was somewhat shorter than Drabkin; thin, with sunken cheeks and a flat bosom. But she possessed an exquisite waist, a pretty mouth with charming lips, a straight nose, small ears and a fair forehead. But most beautiful of all were her long black tresses and her blue eyes.

If she had only possessed a dowry, she would have been seized upon long before, but she did not own even a good dress. So the young fellows hovered about her for the mere sake of her company, paid her compliments, which she received, however, with a silent smile, and tried

to play with her hands, which she would bashfully withdraw. She acquired a reputation as a "touch-me-not," and the reason for this attitude was popularly attributed to the soft spot in her heart for Drabkin.

And she really loved him. But it seemed to her that Drabkin would never marry. "He has no use for it." Never had he offended her with a word, let alone a touch. He always spoke to her only about "his interests," about justice and injustice,—sought the truth among folks and failed to find it. At such times he would spurt flames, thump the table and run madly about the room. "No," she would tell herself. "He will not, he should not, he must not marry!"

But suppose he *should* marry her? . . . Oh, what a life would be hers! She would work,—work ever so hard, enough for two, and he was earning good money, besides. But she would not interfere with him in any way. Not in the slightest. Let him remain just as he was. A precious soul, indeed! Ah, Lord of the

universe, what a happy existence they'd lead! . . .

But no! . . . Soon children would come. . . . She would not be able to work. Her mother . . .

"God, God in Heaven, why do you visit such punishment upon the poor!" she would despair. He must not, he must not marry. . . . But what a happy life they would lead, what a happy life! . . .

And she concealed her feelings from him. This was exceedingly difficult. Oh, how she would have loved to throw her arms about him, and press him to her tightly, ever so tightly,—press her very soul into him,—become together with him a single being. . . . Her breath would come in gasps, she would grow dizzy, and her temples would throb with hammer blows. She hardly dared sit near him, lest he discover what was going on in her heart. And suppose he *should* discover? . . .

Suppose he should discover, and embrace her,

and place his arms about her neck, and kiss her, caress her, squeeze her! . . .

A strangely sweet sensation would ripple over her body, until she began to tremble.

He was standing so close to her. She could almost feel his breath. And she watched every movement of his, read his eyes,—perhaps . . .

Then she would be ashamed of herself on account of her thoughts. Such impossibilities as came into her head! Such selfish thoughts as she could think, when he was speaking of such lofty subjects!

It was altogether unbecoming. . . . Fie!

IV

BUT Drabkin married. Not Chashke, but a certain Chyenke, a girl with a dowry of five hundred roubles.

This happened to him after a terrible fit of fury against all the bosses in the world. He came to a great determination: he would himself become a boss.

"Let all trace of them be wiped off the face of the earth,—the exploiters!" he cried, running up and down the room. "Let no memory of them remain,—the vampires! May they be sown thickly and grow up sparse, the cannibals! Enough! All over! I'll become a boss myself! . . ."

He became silent, but continued to pace about. He was planning.

"He'll become a boss!" scoffed the old woman. "A bosh, you mean!"

She broke into cutting laughter. Chashke looked at her uneasily.

"For myself, in business only for myself," he spoke, meditatively.

"Ha-ha! He'll have to pawn his breeches," laughed the old woman.

And Chashke transferred her uneasy look to Drabkin. She had at once begun to wonder how he was going to make even a start.

"Never mind. I'll get money!" he assured them. "I can get ten times as many partners as I need. Everybody knows what an expert worker I am."

"God grant it!" answered the mother, doubtfully. She had little confidence in Drabkin. But Chashke's heart was eased of a burden. She believed that it would be easy for him to find a partner.

He, however, found something that he was not seeking. He found a bride with a dowry.

This happened just at the time when he was tiring of looking about for a partner. He was

pouring out the bitterness of his heart before an old friend.

"Enough! I've got the right partner for you!" cried the friend. "And a partner for your whole life."

Drabkin looked hard at him.

"Do you want to marry a girl with five hundred roubles?"

Drabkin's heart sank within him. To descend to mere matchmaking! Five hundred roubles! Suddenly before his eyes appeared the vision of Chashke.

"The people I'm talking about are very anxious to have you," his friend was saying. "A perfect doll of a girl! And clever at her trade,—one out of a thousand. . . . Hush, she's a pocketbook maker, just like yourself."

Drabkin was still unable to realise what it was all about, and the image of Chashke continued to hover before his eyes.

"They're very anxious to have you," repeated his friend. "It seems to me that the girl is head over heels in love with you. She

knows you for a long time. I believe she used to work with you. Well, are you willing? Just say the word and one, two,—it's done. I won't ask you for any marriage-broker's fee. I'll ask only the honour of leading you under the canopy. Well?"

"A match?" was all Drabkin could stammer. "I'll not listen to the idea! . . ."

"What? Don't you ever intend to marry?" interrupted the other, with scorn. "Are you going to enter a monastery? Don't be a fool, and listen to good advice. Five hundred roubles dowry, and you become a boss, with a wife that'll be a true help to you. Don't waste a moment thinking it over! . . . As true as I'm a Jew, you'll just *have* to marry that girl!"

His friend was getting excited. He divulged the name of the prospective father-in-law,—Grunim the glazier—and that of the girl—Chyenke, a maiden of golden virtues, so beautiful that Drabkin, compared with her, would have to hide in the oven,—and smart? A question! Just like Bileam! As decent as God has

ordained,—a virtuous child, “so may I have good fortune!”

His friend wrought with might and main,—argued, vociferated, screamed, bellowed, thundered,—and finally Drabkin had to adjourn with him to a tavern and treat to drinks. And after the first three glasses the friend ran off to the girl’s father.

“You’ll thank me as long as you live!” was his farewell to Drabkin.

Left to himself, Drabkin began to feel that the match was really a windfall. Five hundred roubles! He—with five hundred roubles! He would work miracles, overturn worlds, he—with five hundred roubles! . . .

And he really knew her. His friend had not told many lies. She wasn’t such a marvel, but at the same time girls like her were not to be found at every turn. Oh yes,—he recalled her perfectly. She was a trifle taller than Chashke,—a bit plumper, too, he imagined. . . . A blonde. . . . She must be quite a lively article, too . . . a fiery creature. . . .

Five hundred roubles! Why, to him that meant . . . unlimited possibilities! . . . Five hundred roubles. . . . Imagine, he would . . . H'm! . . .

He couldn't recall exactly, but it seemed to him that she was very skilful at her work. Now wait,—at whose place was it that she and he had worked together?

He shut his eyes and tried to remember. Was it at Abraham Baer's? Or at . . . at . . . Where the devil had they worked together? . . . No, he could not recall it. But he recalled distinctly that she was a good pocket-book-maker. And once she came into his hands he'd make an expert of her.

Chashke's figure still kept looming before him, yet he imagined that he was thinking of Chyenke and beholding her.

When Chashke came home that evening he at once related the proposed match to her and asked her advice.

Chashke turned pale and then red.

"Oh, what a terrible headache I have to-

day!" she answered, with a quiver in her voice.

Drabkin believed her headache. So did her mother.

"Probably choked with bad air," murmured the old woman. "Over in her shop they're all afraid they'll freeze. Destruction seize them! I'll take the hot water out of the oven and you'll bathe your head and feel better."

In this way she poured out her heart upon the heads of Chashke's employers. For her heart was sorely embittered: all along she had looked upon Drabkin as her Chashke's future husband.

Chashke was silent. Drabkin looked at her, waiting for a reply.

"Perhaps you know this Chyenke?" he began anew. "They say she's a splendid girl."

"What should I know? It looks like a good proposition. Five hundred roubles. And Chyenke, from what I know of her, is really a splendid girl. Good luck to you!"

Yet at the last words her voice trembled.

The old woman spoke nothing to spoil the

match, and became enraged against Chyenke and her five hundred roubles,—against Drabkin, against Chashke, against herself and her whole life of poverty. She restrained her tears and prepared many a complaint for the Lord of the universe.

Meanwhile Drabkin was laying his plans. He spoke in a merry mood and did not notice the grief about him.

He noticed it, however, a few days later, when he entered the house in glee and announced that the betrothal was to take place the following day. Chashke turned pale, seized her breast and nearly swooned. His words died on his lips: now he understood everything.

“Chashke, what’s the matter?” he cried, in his fright, although he knew very well what was the matter. He brought her a glass of water.

The old woman danced about her daughter, and Drabkin stood there, overwhelmed. Tears came to his eyes. Now, for the first time, he

understood why, in the past few days, Chashke had come so often before his eyes when he spoke of the other girl. For the first time he realised whom he really needed.

He was seized with an impulse to rush over to Chashke, embrace her, throw his arms about her neck, kiss her, and swear to her that he would marry only her. . . .

He dashed into his room in distraction, pale, agitated.

"What madness has possessed him?" asked the old woman angrily.

And Chashke began to weep even more bitterly, and pressed her breast harder than ever.

V

DRABKIN'S wedding was postponed for half a year, but the dowry of five hundred roubles was at once placed into his hands, that he might open a shop immediately. For he was known by all to be an honourable man.

He bought a sewing-machine, shears, knives; wooden pliers he made himself; and together with his future wife he sat down to work. The shop, naturally, was in her name.

He was submerged with orders.

He became a new man,—jollier, livelier, more enthusiastic. He attacked his work arduously.

It seemed that he wanted to pile up more and more money.

He felt a sensation that he had never before experienced. He had money! He had money! He was a boss for himself! Often he would get

a ticklish feeling, and he would smile happily and begin to hum a tune. He was superlatively happy. He made plans—the dowry would grow, he would accumulate heaps of money, he would accomplish miracles! . . .

“I’ll show them!” he would shout, triumphantly, to nobody in particular, pushing the treadle of his machine vigorously as he sewed away.

“Show whom?” asked his fiancée, after he had shouted his defiance for the tenth time.

“Everybody!” he replied. “They’ll hear from me!”

And then he would fall to explaining just how he would “show them.”

A single cloud, however, darkened his bright sky: he longed for Chashke. Chashke was lacking.

He would blink, screw up his eyes as he smeared a thread with pitch, and gaze at his betrothed, but all the time he would be thinking of Chashke, comparing her with his affianced.

"Why do you look at me like that?" Chy-enke would ask with a smile.

But he would make no reply, continuing to smear his thread with pitch.

"Haven't you ever seen me before? Do you want to see whether you've made a mistake in choosing me?" she would continue, throwing her work aside and placing her arms about his neck.

But he remained silent. He stuck the thread through the eye of the needle and began to sew. He felt that this woman beside him was a stranger,—that he did not even know her.

"Are you angry with me?" asked the stranger, releasing his head and ready to become angry herself.

"Why angry?" he replied, looking intently upon the pocketbook as he pierced it with the needle. "I looked at you. Is it forbidden me to look at you?"

He would step often into Chashke's, if only for a few moments. And for even these few

moments they both felt heavy at heart. Both stood there with tears in their eyes.

When Drabkin would come for a visit, the old woman would go off into the kitchen, muttering to herself and wrinkling her brow. There she would sit down before a dingy little lamp, beginning to darn a stocking and staring into the semi-gloom, lost in thought of her foolish, unfortunate daughter.

Drabkin, at such times, would stand by the window and write upon the panes with his fingers, or gaze vacantly before him, waiting for Chashke to speak.

And Chashke sat bent over her work, and something tugged, tugged away at her heart-strings.

She was waging a tremendous battle. She wished to forget everything. All was over! Too late! It was so decreed by Fate! Yet a frightful, poignant yearning held her in its grip. And in the solitude of night she would moisten the pillow with hot tears that rolled slowly down her cheeks. And often it would seem to

her that there would come a day,—who knew in how many years around?—when he would come falling at her feet and . . . Ah, she had never thought the matter out to its conclusion. . . .

But he must not learn of her sufferings!

And Chashke would take courage, breathe more easily, and be the first to speak.

"How are you getting along? Plenty of work?"

Yes. On this topic he could find ever so much to say. But he felt sad at heart. He then replied in a nasal tone, "Nothing to complain. Work is the least of my worries."

"For whom are you making purses now?" she asked, ignoring his last words.

"For Etkin," he replied, curtly, as if angry that she should harp on that theme.

But no, he must really tell her how, from his own former employer, Mayshe Baruch, he had won away as a customer the shopkeeper Etkin. That was certainly interesting. And gradually he became engrossed in his talk and warmed

to his subject, telling how he had brought a piece of his work into Etkin's and how everybody had viewed it with delight. And at once he received a big order for more. And Mayshe Baruch had met him and tried to intimidate him by threatening to slap his face. Ha-ha-ha, he had found the right one to scare! No sirree! He'd show Mayshe! He would go in to Brzerzinski, for whom Mayshe Baruch did work, and let Mayshe try to do something to him! Aha! He'd put Mayshe Baruch out of business in a jiffy. . . . And he was even considering going in to Abraham Baer's customers. He had a score to settle with Abraham Baer. He knew all his customers, even those from out of town, and he would send quotations for work to all of them. . . . He'd show them! . . . He'd lead the bosses a merry dance!

Chashke listened with delight. But a single question weighed upon her heavily; she could not repress it. She lowered her head over her

work and asked, with a stifled voice, "How is your Chyenke?"

He interrupted his account and suddenly became sad once more.

"How should she be? She works."

And again he stared vacantly through the window. She remained bent over her work, without raising her eyes. And soon they parted, with hearts as heavy as stone. . . .

But later he became so engrossed in his work that he forgot the burden of his heart. He grew accustomed to Chyenke and became more talkative. And once he began to tell her how he used to quarrel with his employers and get the best of them. She laughed. Yes, she knew all about him and his pranks.

"I never spoke a pleasant word to any of them. Not even with the best of them," he told her. "I always showed them my claws."

"I'll tell you the truth," she asserted, with a serious mien. "If I had been your employer I wouldn't have let you darken my door. Even if I knew that I'd make millions from you."

He made no reply, working the treadle faster than before, and waiting for Chyenke to continue.

"It won't be like that in our shop," she added.

"Certainly not," he hastened to agree.

"We'll deal differently with our employés."

"Differently or not differently," she replied, "if anybody tries such tricks with us, we'll take him by the collar right away and down the stairs he goes!"

"That's merely what you say. . . ."

"And that's exactly how it'll be," she answered with the same gravity as before. "If I'm a boss, then I must be a boss. I know. I've worked for bosses, too, and have quarrelled with them. And you may be sure that they were in the wrong. But to fight just for the fun of it! I'd like to see them try it!"

"It couldn't happen in our place," he said. "I'll yield to them in everything."

"What do you mean, yield to them in everything?" Her voice rose slightly. "Bah! Not

even a hair's breadth! Why should I treat people better than I myself was treated?"

Drabkin turned pale. His hand trembled.

"We'll see about that," he answered weakly. He restrained himself, but his blood was boiling.

"What shall we see, what?" asked Chyenke. "I certainly won't treat my employés any better than I was treated. Why should I give in to them? Let them walk all over me?"

He was silent. He was already infuriated, but strove to choke back his words. He applied himself industriously to his work and did not utter another sound, although it was a long time before Chyenke stopped talking. . . .

That night he ran to Chashke. He repeated the conversation to her.

"Did you ever hear such talk?" he cried, as he finished his story.

"Chyenke is as right as the day," interposed the old woman.

"Did you ever hear such talk?" he repeated, looking into Chashke's eyes.

"Well?" she queried, coldly.

"What do you mean, 'Well?' " he shouted.

"What do you mean by your 'Well?' "

"What do you expect? Everybody to agree with you?"

"What do you mean, everybody to agree with me? What do you mean?" he gesticulated.

"Isn't she engaged to me?"

"But you each have minds of your own and hearts of your own," replied Chashke.

"He'd like his betrothed to be as stupid as himself," the old woman chimed in.

"But why? How comes it that you understand?" he insisted to Chashke.

"She always was a big fool," the mother replied. But the daughter blushed, and was silent.

"Then why shouldn't she?" persisted Drabkin, referring to his betrothed.

"Well——" interrupted Chashke.

He was at a loss for a plausible response.

"Well, speak, what is it you wish?"

"What should I wish? I don't wish anything," he snarled indignantly.

He left the house in silent anger. He had wanted her to help him feel angry, to be beside himself with rage as usual. . . .

The following day he tried again to talk the matter over with Chyenke, but she merely repeated her opinions of yesterday.

"Then I tell you," he exclaimed, concisely and firmly, "that our employés shall be treated as *I* see fit!"

"And I tell you," interjected Chyenke, "that in the first place we haven't any employés, nor are we hiring any. And in the second place, they'll be treated as *I* think proper!"

"We shall *see*!"

"We *shall* see!"

He became angry, she became angry, and they did not speak to each other for the rest of that day.

"If that's the kind of a fellow he is," she thought, "then he's not going to have the say about the money."

He sat there as if on pins and needles. He was in a rage; his blood was boiling. He wanted to spring up, spit out with scorn and break with Chyenke for good. But something restrained him. That "something" did not permit him to carry out what he yearned so strongly to do. That "something" held him riveted to the spot and dammed his anger. And that "something" was not very clear to him. He only felt it strongly; it sent a warmth through his whole body. . . . Just through his inside pocket. . . .

"Well, well. We'll see," he thought. "After the wedding it'll be a different story."

When they separated at the end of that day Chyenke said to him, "Well, now run off to your Chashke and fill her ears with complaints against me."

"If I want to run to her, I won't ask you."

Chyenke had resolved to put an end to his visits to Chashke. If he cared more for Chashke, then let him take her. She could afford to have a sweetheart all her own.

But she desired to raise no scandals before the wedding. After their marriage she would know how to wean him away from Chashke's, and how to keep her from ever crossing their threshold. . . .

But Drabkin seemed to have lost all desire to go to Chashke. He did not go to her that evening, nor the next. Why should he? He was angry with her.

VI

CHYENKE and her parents were in glee at the wedding, for her dowry of five hundred roubles had in the meantime increased to seven hundred. Chyenke felt like a wealthy woman, and her parents congratulated themselves upon being the father and mother of a rich lady.

Drabkin, however, was not in good humour. A certain fear hovered over him. After the wedding he foresaw war. . . .

And surely enough, five months later the war began. They had decided to go into manufacturing their own goods, without waiting for work to be brought in to them from the shops. This would require an independent establishment with a number of employés.

He had seen several workingmen, old friends and former shopmates.

"What do you say, boys? Will you come to work for me?"

"You don't say, Drabkin! So you're really becoming a boss?"

"Listen to him. He doesn't let the grass grow under his feet!"

"Well. Will you work for me?"

"Why not? You'll pay wages twice as high as the regular rate, of course," laughed the workingmen.

"You don't have to worry about such matters when you deal with me," he assured them, at the same time thinking of his wife.

"You'll really pay twice the regular wages?"

"I told you not to worry about that, you blockheads! You'll get higher pay from me than from anybody else, and you'll work considerably less."

They all parted in great contentment. And Drabkin told himself that he had won a victory over his wife after all. . . .

"To-morrow four operators will come here," he announced to Chyenke when he came home

that night. And he began to recite their names. "Abraham, who used to work for Abraham Baer; Labke, who. . . ."

"What are you going to pay them?" she interrupted, scrutinising him closely from under her furrowed brows.

He was silent. He wondered what figure he could name.

"Why don't you speak?" she asked, more sternly than before, eyeing him more closely.

Suddenly he became bold and self-assertive. Why need he fear her? He'd tell her point-blank! And if she didn't like it, she'd have to . . . that's all! With a smiling countenance he repeated the details of his arrangements with the workingmen.

"May evil dreams descend upon the heads of all my enemies," she shrieked, slapping her palms indignantly together. "Are you drunk, or crazy? There's a millionaire for you! What's a few hundred roubles to you? Here! Take my dowry and give it away! . . ."

"You don't like it? Then don't!" he an-

swered gruffly. "I refuse to be like the rest of them. I will not be a cut-purse!"

"Look at him!—A cut-purse!" she snarled venomously. "Fine business man you are! Am I, a proprietor, and now with child, to work fourteen and fifteen hours a day, and have my own employés go around in my place like men of leisure? My enemies won't live to see it! May they waste in illness as long as such a thing never was and never will be!" . . .

"I've already told you," he interrupted incisively, "if you don't like it, then don't!"

"What kind of words are those!" she screamed. "I'll have you understand that meanwhile *I* am the boss, and the money is *mine!* . . . Did you bring such a pile to it? Then things will be as I wish them to be. You'll see whether they work for me or not. What do you think of the fellow? Wants to be a public benefactor! H'm!"

"Listen to me, Chyenke. None of your tricks, now!"

"None of *your* tricks! What are you going

to do about it? Beat me? I'm not afraid of such trifles! . . ." She was now shrieking shrilly.

He looked at her angrily and gnashed his teeth.

Suddenly she threw on her coat and ran off to her parents. . . .

An hour later, her father, her mother, her father's brother Jonah the tailor, and her mother's brother Jehiel the cobbler, stalked into the room, preceded by Chyenke, whose face shone with triumph. Drabkin greeted them with none too happy a countenance, and continued his work at the machine.

"What's the trouble here between you?" began Grunim the glazier.

"What are you so angry about?" asked his mother-in-law, venomously. "I suppose you imagine you're in the right?"

"I'm not asking anybody whether I'm right or wrong," he replied, even more venomously.

"A fine answer!" responded the mother-in-law, indignantly.

"It's good enough for me," said Drabkin, pushing the treadle.

"Just the same you needn't be impudent about it," interposed Grunim, beginning to lose his temper.

But Chyenke interceded and prevented a quarrel.

"Just reckon it out for him. Reckon it out," she said, turning to her Uncle Jonah. "Let him hear."

"Drop your work," suggested Uncle Jehiel, "and listen to reason."

"I've got nothing to listen to."

"Don't be a child!"

"What is there to discuss, what?" He rose from his place. "I said once and for all that I refuse to be a cut-purse."

"You talk like a child," began Uncle Jonah. "I'm no cut-purse myself, and I get along first rate with my employés! But everything must be done with foresight, with a reckoning! You, my dear child,—you," he began, falling into the sing-song intonation of the Gemara, "you're

starting out as a manufacturer,—you're a new competitor in the market. Then you must try to sell your goods cheaper. But how are you going to do this when your labour is going to cost you more than it costs anybody else?" he ended, ironically, his arms akimbo, looking from face to face with an air of triumph.

"I know the reckoning!" retorted Drabkin, obstinately.

"No, you don't!" shouted the tailor, waving his right hand in the air and then bringing it back to his hips. "You don't know! If you did, you wouldn't do as you wish to do! . . . Let me repeat it to you, my youngster, you . . ." and again he lapsed into the Talmudic sing-song—"Wages will cost you practically twice as much as any other, and your workingmen will produce half as much per day as in any other shop. Well, where's your brains? Your goods will cost four times as dear! . . . Who's going to buy it of you? Is it going to be covered with spangles?"

"I tell you, I don't care to hear any reckonings!" cried Drabkin.

"Then you're a fool, a jackass, a simpleton!" replied Jonah, heatedly.

"It's the first time in my life I see such a person!" asserted Jehiel, shrugging his shoulders.

"Shut up. It's no worry of yours," scowled Drabkin. "I'll do exactly as I please."

"What do you mean,—exactly as you please?" shrilled Grunim. "You're not the boss yet. Meanwhile Chyenke has the say here!"

"Certainly!" corroborated the mother-in-law.

"Certainly!" echoed Chyenke.

"And you're an impudent rascal, a loafer!" scolded Grunim.

"A know-nothing, a dunce, who doesn't understand from here to there," cried Jonah. "The goods will cost him. . . ."

"He ought to be put into the insane asylum with all the other lunatics!" chimed Jehiel, falling into Jonah's sing-song.

"Fine pleasure we've lived to enjoy!" grumbled the mother-in-law to herself.

"What do you think of the fellow!" cried Chyenke, casting a venomous glance in Drabkin's direction. "A public benefactor!"

Drabkin seized his coat and dashed through the door.

* . VII

HE ran to Chashke.

He was terribly pale, and Chashke and her mother were frightened when he entered.

"What is the matter?" cried Chashke.

He threw himself upon the wooden lounge, lowered his head and was silent. Both women stared at him.

"Is your tongue paralysed?" asked the old woman, finally breaking the silence.

"What's happened over at your place? Speak, man," entreated Chashke.

"What should happen?" he asked angrily. "It happened! My wife is no better than the rest! She'd like to run everything. Everything!"

He recounted all that had taken place in his home.

"His wife is a wise woman, upon my word," offered the old woman after hearing the story.

But Drabkin was anxious to know what Chashke thought.

"Well, what do you think of the reckoning?" he asked, eyeing her intently.

"I never studied mathematics——"

He made a gesture of impatience, and she added,—*"but I believe that the figures are correct."*

"And suppose they *are* correct,—then what?"

He was growing angry.

"What do I know?" replied Chashke, coldly. "If they are correct, then from the looks of things, matters can't be otherwise."

"What do you mean,—'can't be otherwise?' Am I, then, to do just like all the other bosses?"

"Who's telling you to become a boss?"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Well, what are you staring at? Keep on working as you've done up to now. Don't take it into your head to run a factory. . . ."

"There's talk for you!"

"Certainly!"

Seething with fury, he left Chashke.

Such ideas she could take into her head!

VIII

CHYENKE knew that Drabkin had run off to Chashke, so when he returned home she was ready to welcome him. "Well? So you've been to your sweetheart, have you?"

But his countenance was so dark and sinister that she began to doubt whether he really had been to Chashke. If he had been there, she thought, he had probably met with a frigid reception. And if this was so, she was sure he would talk otherwise now.

She cautioned him sternly not to make any scenes and not to give cause for tongue-wagging and people's laughter.

"What a madness to fall into a man's head! Why, folks would run after us in the street! Really! Who? What? When? To go simply crazy and slave away for our employés! Then what do I need the whole business for? I may as well not run a factory altogether!"

The last words recalled to his mind Chashke's advice. Only—that was sheer nonsense. . . . Neither of the women knew what she was talking about. He would do as he pleased. He would ask advice of nobody.

Chyenke continued:

"To-morrow, you tell your workingmen that if they're willing to work under the same conditions as they've known hitherto, they may come here ready for business. If not, let them be off in the best of health. We don't need them. Such bargains may be picked up any day!"

"I'm not asking you what to tell them," he retorted coldly, stretching himself out on the sofa.

Chyenke scowled at him. She was out of breath. What could she do now? Shriek, weep, or throw the shears she was holding at his head, or her own? She threw the shears upon the floor, sprang up from her seat and began to pace about the room. She could hold back from shrieking. She knew that ultimately

she would win out. But she felt an intense desire to wreak vengeance upon him in some way. She would have been delighted to—stick a few needles into him. . . .

She lay down on the bed. Her head seethed with the most confused thoughts,—how best to avenge herself upon that man. The first decision she reached was to lie just as she was, fully dressed, all night long on the unmade bed.

And he lay in a daze, unable to think. In his dream he spoke and fought with the whole world. There came back to him old, half-forgotten scenes of his early life, scenes in the various shops where he had been employed, Chashke. . . . “No,—such ideas she could take into her head!” A vast shop appeared before him, containing an army of employés, and he was the owner—and his heart began to throb more loudly.

Chyenke had long before stopped thinking; her heart, however, from time to time, contracted with the bitterness of her unsated desire for revenge. She arose from the bed, pre-

pared it for the night, undressed, and lay down again. She did not prepare *his* bed. But soon it began to annoy her that he should lie as he did and not go to sleep.

"Why are you letting the lamp burn? Is oil so cheap?" she asked, in no friendly tones.

He did not move.

This vexed her keenly. Her heart was again ready to burst, and she burned with a desire to make him feel her resentment. But she could think of nothing. She turned her face to the wall, lay with eyes open, thinking, thinking how she would heap upon him all the evil in the world, and how she would contradict him in every wish he expressed.

The next moment she sprang up hastily from bed,—ran over to the table and put out the lamp.

"Lie in darkness!" she scowled sharply, crawling back into bed.

He did not move.

"What do I care if he lies there like that?" she thought. "May he never get up again!"

Yet she was vexed to death.

She jumped up and in the dark began to make his bed. She worked angrily, jerking the sheet, tossing the pillow and pulling the blanket violently.

He remained upon the sofa in the same position as before, motionless.

He lay in thought, thus taking his revenge. Aha! He would not go to bed! Not he! He knew that she was boiling with rage. Let her learn a lesson!

Was he, then, to work like a horse and yet have no say in the business, not to be able to do as he thought best? . . . No, *he* was boss now, and let them all go to perdition! . . .

But he knew that Chyenke would not hesitate to create the most fearful scenes, and he felt that he would be unable to win out. In such a case he would break with Chyenke altogether,—get a divorce. His temples began to throb violently and his heart-beats sounded like hammer-blows. Let her pound her head against the wall with her money, her shop and

the whole business! He would marry Chashke and live the kind of life he preferred: a quiet, peaceful, honest existence. They loved each other so! How on earth had he ever married the other woman! Such folly! . . .

But he was suddenly overcome with a feeling of dejection. His heart became heavy. Poverty. Two corpses dancing. Again he would have to become a workingman and endure the oppression of employers. How much did Chashke earn, anyway? Next to nothing. And the old woman would be on his hands. . . . A fine old lady, he must admit. And she liked him. And yet . . . he sighed deeply.

He already had quite a sum of money. Almost an even thousand roubles.

A strange warmth pervaded his being.

He had a good deal of work, too. He could really start a large factory, and in time——

He fairly lost his breath. He really had a wonderful opportunity to attain great wealth,—here was a chance to work wonders. He—with such a capital and a reputation like his, and with

an industrious worker like Chyenke. For she was truly a wonderful worker. As capable as the strongest of men.

And, he must confess, she was certainly good-looking. A genuine beauty, far prettier than when she was a girl. Much better looking than Chashke. For a fleeting moment he felt that this thought insulted Chashke and shamed him, but his fatigued brain continued to think confusedly.

Chyenke loved him, too,—ever so much. Despite everything she had made his bed! Ha-ha-ha! . . .

And to tell the truth, all of them were right. "You child, you, wages will cost you practically twice as much as another, and your men will accomplish during the day only half as much as elsewhere! Well, smarty! . . . Then your goods will cost you four times as much. . . ." Uncle Jonah's words and the Gemara sing-song echoed in his ears. Yet somehow or other he could not grasp the figures. Just why would his

goods cost him four times as much, rather than twice?

"But it seems to me the reckoning is correct," Chashke's words returned to him.

He would try to figure it out for himself. He concentrated his mind. Their wages would be . . . no, not twice as much as the regular rate. He was not so foolish as all that, even if he had never learned accounting. He would give them merely a slight advance over current wages. Well,—and they would accomplish, during the day—why only half as much? The idea! Only half as much! "Well, smarty! Then your goods . . ." echoed Uncle Jonah's words once more. So then, how much dearer would his goods cost him? He was anxious to know, and furrowed his forehead. . . . "Even as the shepherd watches over his flock. . . ." A snatch of a New Year's prayer began to hum in his ears. But he dismissed the tune and continued his calculations. His drowsiness overcame him—he could not figure it out.

". . . Seems to me the reckoning is correct

. . ." came Chashke's words again to his mind.

He was already falling asleep, but he banished rest. He must think things out.

But what could he do? The reckoning was correct. "Who's telling you to become a boss?" Bah! "She's a big fool, is Chashke. . . . At times she speaks the most arrant nonsense," he corrected himself. He had merely been a trifle too hasty with his employés; he should have thought it over before accosting them. But he had made no contract with them—he had simply made a mistake. But just the same they would work under the best of conditions. He would never speak a harsh word to them! . . .

There. Now he would go to sleep. The rest of the matter he would think out the following day. He would undress and go to bed. And should he make up with Chyenke as he passed her? He would come quietly up to her, embrace her and give her a kiss. Such a beautiful wifey! And so industrious! Such a fiery woman! Something drew him irresistibly towards her. But he controlled himself. He did

not quite know what he would do the next day. And again, he had a strong feeling that he need not yet surrender. . . .

He became deeply depressed. He longed for Chyenke. He wanted to call her by her name, to go to her—and fell asleep upon the sofa with the thought that his employés would work under the very best conditions.

“Ha! He did it, just to spite me! He lay all night on the sofa! . . . For my part may you lie there forever!”

These were Chyenke’s first words when she opened her eyes next morning and beheld her husband upon the sofa.

Drabkin was about to reply with words of affection. He felt like playing with her. He still experienced the powerful attraction of the night before. Yet he wished to remain angry still. He simply could not relinquish the idea that in his shop the workers would enjoy entirely different conditions. He made no reply to Chyenke’s words and became sullen.

It seemed to him that he could not alter his promise to the workingmen, who were to come that morning. He decided to leave the house, so as not to be in when they came. Let Chyenke do as she pleased. His hands would be clean. He began to feel a keen displeasure that things should not be as he desired, and somewhere in the recesses of his mind arose the thought that he ought to throw up the whole business. But that was a futile notion. The wisest thing, he thought, was not to be in when the workingmen came. He dressed hurriedly and left.

"Where are you going?"

"Where I need to go."

But Chyenke took no offence. She understood his idea and rejoiced.

"Aha! My fine statesman!" she spoke triumphantly, shaking her head, after he had shut the door behind him.

Soon the workingmen arrived one after the other. Chyenke held herself somewhat aloof, not even looking at them and feigning to search for something.

"Where is Drabkin?"

"Gone out!" she mumbled in reply. "What is it?"

"We've come ready to work. He hired us. Didn't he tell you anything about it?"

"You've come ready to work?" she suddenly scowled, raising her voice and filling it with all the venom of her anger. "Fine folks you are! I tell you! Found a fool and What do you think? Found an easy-mark, didn't you? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves even to mention such conditions. Why, it's downright robbery! What do you take us for,—millionaires? Do you think we're rolling in roubles? Where are we going to get the money to pay you such wages?" . . . She was now screaming. "They found a fool and turned his head! With him everything is right. Whatever you tell him, he lets you have your way. If another fellow happened along at the same time and told him to give away all he had, he would have done so. Does he stop to consider? Does he care a jot? You were foolish not to ask him

four times as much as you did, as wages for sitting in his shop and looking at him! . . . Bah! Upon my word! . . ."

"What's all this screeching about?" asked one of the men with an ironic smile. "You don't want us? You don't have to! We've had work up to now and we won't go around idle now. We didn't come asking him for work, either. He came to us! . . ."

"Suppose he did! Is that any reason for trying to skin him?" replied Chyenke indignantly. "You came to the right place. . . . Do you think you've got another fool here?"

"If we're given, why shouldn't we take?"

"That's just the trouble. You struck a fool. But, thank Heaven, I've a little say in the matter. If you're willing to work at regular rates then you may start in at once. If not, suit yourselves—I'll find plenty of hands."

"We know nothing about all this," insisted the men. "Drabkin told us to come to work."

"Just for that," cried Chyenke in fury, "I'll

not take you even for nothing. Let Drabkin take you! I am the boss here!"

For a while the workingmen eyed her with scorn, a smile of contempt upon their lips, then they turned to the door.

"I tell you, boys," groaned one of them in jest, "you take it from me; Drabkin has it far worse with this new boss of his than he ever had it with any of his old ones!"

Chyenke simply glared daggers at the speaker and was silent.

The workingmen had not proceeded far upon their way when they noticed Drabkin. At sight of them Drabkin's heart fell. Quickly he disappeared through a gate.

"The fellow has given us the slip!"

"Do you know what? We ought to wait for him here and give his nose a good rubbing."

The plan was accepted. A couple of the men went into the yard and two remained on watch at the gate. Drabkin saw all this and was forced to seek refuge in a place where the noxious odours took his breath away. . . .

There he remained, but the workingmen did not move from their places.

And really, why should he be hiding from them? he thought. Had he stolen anything of theirs? Had he tricked them? Had he talked them out of taking another position? He could even pay them for that day, if they wished.

There he remained, as if rooted to the spot. . . . A strange, strong feeling of shame held him there. Standing in that foul atmosphere, hiding from his fellow men, he felt that he was entering upon a new path, that he was becoming an altogether new Drabkin. He could not even explain to himself the exact nature of this change, just what was happening to his character, to his whole being. Several times Chashke came to his mind, with Chyenke directly behind; through his head echoed snatches of his old catch-phrases,—but all this, somehow or other, like old faces, old echoes, things from long ago. . . .

And he stood there as if rooted to the spot.

But this must come to an end. He resolved

to come forth from his place of concealment. With a cough, he opened the door, and began, with a serious countenance, to button his coat. He lowered his glance to the ground, as if deeply absorbed in thought. His hat, to be sure, was somewhat crooked on his head. He thought that if he did not look at them he might succeed in passing them by unnoticed. At any rate, let them believe that he was profoundly preoccupied.

The workingmen came forward to meet him. He raised his eyes exactly in time to encounter their glances. A sweet smile curled on his lips—he pretended to have noticed them for the first time.

“What kept you in there so long?”

“Where? . . . When? . . . Oh, in there? . . . So so. . . . My stomach. . . .”

“Your stomach! You scamp! We understand your tricks. You were hiding!”

“Hiding? . . . What do you mean? . . . From whom? From whom need I hide? Of whom need I be afraid?” replied Drabkin.

"See here. What did we agree to yesterday?" began one of the men heatedly.

"Yes, that's just what I wanted to talk over with you," began Drabkin in a friendly manner. "I'm afraid I'll have to take it all back. My wife got after me yesterday, and all her relatives too, and . . . Oh! . . . I had a day of it. . . . Oh! . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and waved his arms, giving his hearers to understand what a terrible day it had been. "They made me out to be crazy. You should have heard! In a word, gentlemen, I must take it all back."

Once again he repeated to them what a terrible day he had gone through. He spoke genially and with genuine regret. He did not wish to have his word lose its value in the eyes of his former companions, and, most of all, he feared their sharp tongues, their pitiless sarcasm. The men looked at him with scorn, not believing a word he said. Nor did he escape their gibes.

"'Exploiters, bloodsuckers . . .'" they mim-

icked. "How does it strike you now? Scamp, you! Devil take you. . . 'Exploiters, blood-suckers, cut-purses' " . . . the workingmen taunted as they left.

And these words cut him to the quick. They were his own words. He could say nothing in retort. He felt that he himself was not yet an exploiter or a bloodsucker, but he could not for the life of him bring the words to his tongue at that moment. And something vexed him so keenly. He was filled with a desire to understand, to grasp just what ailed him: he was, it seemed, the same Drabkin as yesterday and the day before, and yet not the same. The old time in which he had been a workingman seemed to be veiled as by a cloud; it was far, far in the past. And before the approaching future he felt ashamed—yet under his bosom there was a strange warmth, and as soon as he felt that warmth he forgot everything else: old times, the disappointed workingmen, their gibes and all evil, troublesome thoughts.

IX

HE returned home in a calm frame of mind. He convinced himself that he was innocent in the matter of the dismissal of the workmen—that is, as far as he was concerned they might be working for him now, as at first agreed, only Chyenke and her brood of relatives . . . No, he was not to blame. Yet he felt a strong friendship for Chyenke such as he had not felt since the wedding.

“I sent your workmen off,” greeted Chyenke, preparing the samovar. “It’s all over now! . . . You won’t put on any lordly airs round here any more! . . . Hereafter *I’ll* do the hiring and the firing!”

“Then *you* do the hiring,” he replied weakly. He was content that he should no longer have to haggle with the new hands, and that his conscience would be clear.

But he was careful not to betray his contentment.

"A fine statesman for you!" scoffed Chyenke with cutting sarcasm, looking into the chimney of the samovar.

He made no reply and got busy upon his work.

From his bench he cast frequent glances toward Chyenke, who was occupied with household duties. She was angry, and did not deign to look in his direction. So he, too, pretended not to look at her.

"She's good looking, Chyenke is . . . a beautiful woman," he thought, stealing a glimpse at her. "A fine figure—and what a bust!" . . . It suddenly occurred to him that he had never thought of "such things" . . . And try as he might, he could not explain to himself what had come over him. Something was drawing him to Chyenke. At that very moment he would gladly have cast his work aside and run over to her. . . . He could not imagine himself kissing her, but he would most

certainly do it if he were to run over to her at that very moment. He was ashamed of the feeling, which made him arise from his place, and he began to look for something upon the table, then about the room, finally edging up to Chyenke.

"How about the samovar?" he asked, sullenly, although he had meant to say something far different and much more friendly.

"Touch it and see," replied Chyenke ill-humouredly, wiping the tea-glasses.

"Touch it and see!" he mocked, good-naturedly, smiling and placing a hand against the samovar. He was at a loss for something nice to say,—something that would conciliate her.

"Whom are you thinking of giving the jobs to?"

"You'll find out!"

She felt that he was trying to make up with her, and that it was now *her* time to take revenge for yesterday's episode. She would have him at her feet yet!

"You'll find out!" he mimicked again with a

smile. But her attitude was beginning to anger him.

Really, why shouldn't he fly into a fury, give her a terrible scolding, thump his fist on the table and show that he was the ruler of the house?

He clinched his teeth, assumed an angry countenance and returned to his work.

She, however, took no heed. She knew for certain that she held the upper hand; just let him try to start something and she'd give it to him so hot and heavy that he wouldn't know where it came from!

He sat there, working away, and felt that he was not at all angry with Chyenke,—that he was merely making a cross face to frighten her into a more tender mood. He glanced at her furtively and knew that he loved her, that a little while later he would be holding her in his arms, on his lap, and would caress her, kiss her, squeeze her. And the thought brought such a tenderness, such a warmth to his heart

that he worked with renewed enthusiasm, stealing countless glances at Chyenke.

"Here's your tea. Drink it!" she ordered, caustically.

He remained seated. This was to signify that he was angry and did not care to know her or her tea.

"Will you take it or not? If you don't, I'll spill your tea into the slop-pail!"

Leisurely he laid his work aside and arose with a smile. This was to signify that he was not at all angry, and that he had not intended to play with her and spite her, but that he had been exceedingly engrossed in his work and could not have abandoned it any sooner. He thrust his arms into the air, stretching himself, yawned and smiled.

"My! But you're hot-tempered!" he laughed.

He really meant it. He wished her to forget her grievance, to be kind once again, to fondle him as before.

He approached the table and pinched her cheek.

She thrust his hand aside.

"Away from me!"

"Psh, psh, psh! What an angry lady!" . . .
He sat down nearby and placed his arms about her waist.

"Better go away before I get angry!" she cried, tearing herself from his grasp.

He pressed her close to him, bent her head toward his and began to kiss her, stifling her outcries with his lips. She seized the glass of hot tea, but he snatched it away from her grasp. Only with the greatest effort did she tear herself free.

"I'll break your head for you!" she screamed, jumping to her feet. He laughed with a passionate, repulsive laughter.

The shadow of his repulsive, passionate laughter still lay upon his lips when he went back to his work. He still felt the kisses upon his lips and felt, too, that he was sated and that

his heart was eased. He attacked his work with a happy will and knew that, in the end, to-morrow or the day after, Chyenke would be won over. He forgot the whole world.

X

THAT evening Chashke and her old mother came for a visit. They were curious to know the state of affairs in Drabkin's household and how the matter had turned out.

"Ah, Chashke!" cried Drabkin with forced gaiety. He had not at all wished her to come. She brought back to him memories of the olden days, of things he no longer wished to recall. She made him feel, moreover, a keen sense of his present subjection. He was ashamed and remained working at his bench.

Chyenke, however, was glad to see them. She wanted to show them that *she* was the boss, and that he lay meekly at her feet. And let his former sweetheart see how *he* loved his wife, how he fawned upon her. And let Chashke burst with vexation and jealousy!

"Well, how are things with you?" inquired the old woman.

Chashke did not care to ask. Already she sensed everything and felt superfluous in Drabkin's home.

"How should things be?" replied Chyenke, in a triumphant voice. "Not so bad. He's changed his mind, my wise man, my know-it-all. Oho! Now, it seems he would like to. . . ."

She did not say what he would like to do, but nodded her head in Drabkin's direction with a glance and with an expression on her face that spoke far more plainly than words.

He did not raise his head and feigned deep absorption in his work. Chashke blushed for him. The room began to feel too narrow for her. She must run away, run away—she sat there as if on burning coals.

The old woman, on the other hand, was soon engrossed in chatter.

"I told him from the very first that you were as clever a woman as I knew, upon my

soul, and my Chashke told him, too, that it couldn't be otherwise, and that he'd be foolish to attempt it."

At these words Drabkin was strongly impelled to raise his head. Chashke herself had really said that it couldn't be otherwise. But at once he recalled what else she had said, and again he felt ashamed and remained seated, his head closely applied to his task, dumb.

Chyenke began to tell how she had sent off the workingmen, and how Drabkin had disappeared from home early that same morning—— "He simply didn't have the heart to witness it."

"And now," she concluded, "I alone hire help and settle things as *I* see fit."

She looked triumphantly at Chashke. Drabkin said nothing.

"Come, mamma. Let's be going home!" urged Chashke, rising.

"What's your hurry?" asked Drabkin.

Chashke would have been delighted to spit square into his face. The old woman answered

that their boarder would come and the door was locked.

They left.

Drabkin felt that Chashke had been there for the last time, and the thought was somewhat disquieting. But this unpleasantness was soon lost in the great contentment that overwhelmed him. He felt more free, more independent; a yoke fell from his neck; there would be no one before his eyes as a continual reminder of his former years and his former talk.

Gone forever,—gone—and forgotten.

Now he would really work,—work honestly. Here God was helping him to become a man among men,—then why shouldn't he do it? And, naturally, he wouldn't be like those dogs, his former employers. He would know that a workingman was a human being, too, and would treat his men altogether differently. They would be to him like his own people, like brothers. Chashke really was a fool.

"Did you see in what a rage your Chashke

left?" asked Chyenke, interrupting his thoughts.

"Why are you always saying 'your' Chashke?" he queried, with a smile.

"I know. You still run to her house."

"Pah! Better come and sit down here, right beside me. So!"

He slapped his knee and stretched his arms out to her.

Chashke's heart was heavy. So heavy, indeed, that she would gladly have wept. Her throat contracted with sorrow. She walked rapidly, and her mother could scarcely keep pace with her.

"Just mark my word," gasped the old woman, running after her daughter, "in a few years Drabkin will be rich,—worth several thousand roubles. *She* has a smart head on her shoulders. If you had only half her brains I wouldn't have to worry about you! Oh! Oh! Ah! . . ."

It was the old mother's disappointment that

spoke in her,—disappointment that nothing had come of the intimacy between Drabkin and her daughter.

“What do you want of me, mamma? Please don’t say any more,” entreated Chashke with a quivering voice, turning her pale countenance toward her mother.

The little old woman was frightened by the quivering voice and the pale countenance. Waving her hand, she shook her head.

“There! I mustn’t say a word!” she sighed.

She spoke no more that night.

Chashke felt as if she had just returned from a cemetery, where she had buried her dearest treasure.

Drabkin, Drabkin! . . . And he had been *her* Drabkin! . . .

Ah, and up to that very day she had dreamed and imagined!

Oh, to weep, to weep——

That night she had a dream. No, not a dream, for she could not fall asleep, and lay

with eyes wide open, staring into the impenetrable darkness.

She beheld how Drabkin was becoming a pot-bellied boss; all his thoughts were centred only upon how to enlarge his shop and fill his purse. Everything else was forgotten—every human impulse, every tinge of sympathy for the poor worker, every spark of compassion for the under-dog. Workingmen to him were hired slaves—and “Ephraim is supposed to work till nine o’clock at night and works till half-past ten; when he came to work this morning at half-past seven, they fell upon him like a mad dog. . . .”

And in the silent darkness it seemed to her that Drabkin struck a cruel blow upon the face of a little child who was apprenticed to him.

A shudder ran through her whole body, and she began to weep hysterically.

A heartbreaking, bitter weeping——

THE BLACK CAT

THE BLACK CAT

IT has been raining for already two days,— a soft, leisurely drizzle, but an endless one. Often it increases in vehemence. It begins to patter upon my roof with rapid fury. Then it seems that at last it is over. Now the dense grey clouds will empty themselves and the downpour will cease. The great fury abates, the racket upon the roof becomes gradually quiet, yet the rain continues to fall, softly and leisurely. Often so softly that it seems to have stopped. Then I look out of the window with just a ray of hope that I shall see a clear sky. But by the wheels that roll incessantly across the pavement I recognise the eternal rain. The eternal rain. The eternal. . . .

○ I lower the shades and turn on the electric light. Let it be night. I'll seat myself upon the armchair before my desk and pursue my thoughts, and think and think of——

Of my fortune—or of my misfortune?

It has come upon me so suddenly that I don't know how to take it. The day before yesterday I was so happy, and to-day my heart is so heavy, so heavy. . . . I know that this is the effect of the ceaseless rain,—of the weeping, lamenting, grey, dark-grey outdoors. Still, I am so restless. My feeling comes from within,—comes over me from the depths of my heart and my soul. It seems to me that I *must* be moody, and I cannot understand how I could have been so high-spirited the day before yesterday. I am vexed that I can no longer be so merry.

So suddenly. So suddenly. . . .

Can it have happened only ten days ago?

Only ten days ago.

She brought me a manuscript, which I was to read and appraise for her.

Young—perhaps twenty, and maybe only eighteen.

And beautiful—beautiful? Yes, even strik-

ingly beautiful. Scarcely had I opened the door and beheld her, when a strange sensation clutched at my heart.

Her eyes! Those deep, black eyes under the long black lashes! They pierced me at once. I could not tear myself away from them. And thus overwhelmed, only half conscious, I received the impression that those eyes were set in a rather long, dark-complexioned, youthful countenance, and that around a low, alluring forehead played several black curls mischievously, and that her whole figure was very svelte and supple,—almost that of a child.

And her voice! Like her eyes. Deep, and of a dark quality, and so warm. No sooner had she asked, "Does Mr. So-and-so live here, and are you not he?" than my eyes and my ears were so completely filled with her that I forgot I must not keep her standing at the door, and that I must invite her in.

She invited herself, however. She entered my room, far beyond the threshold, and I closed the door slowly, without removing my glance

from her. And remained standing as if hypnotised, without knowing whether to make inquiry or to wait until she would tell me who she was and what she wished of me.

She laughed. Deep, warm, ringing laughter. Why did I not ask her to be seated?

Oh, yes. Pardon. And I, the father of a daughter almost as old as she, turned red with embarrassment, it seems. I hastened to fetch her a chair, but she had already chosen one and sat down.

She continues to speak, while I take my place in my armchair before the desk and gaze, gaze upon her, my ears thirstily and enchantedly drinking in the sound of her voice.

She tells me that she pictured me exactly as I am. She has read everything I have written. She knows all my writings well and has imagined a picture of me. And the picture is correct. But she did not think I possessed so many grey hairs. That makes no difference, however. For I am young. She is certain of

that. But she still has no idea of how my voice sounds. She thus hints that I have said nothing as yet. And she laughs.

I join the laughter and am at a loss for words. I feel that I must say something *significant*,—that the maidenly vision with the beautiful child-like figure, who knows all my writings and has formed a perfect image of me, is now waiting for deep and notable words to issue from my lips. Nor do I desire to be insignificant. I don't care to utter plain, ordinary, pedestrian words. So I smile and wait for her to speak further.

She looks about the room, resting her glance for a moment upon the paintings that hang upon my walls. And soon she transfers her eyes once more to me. Sharp, penetrating glances, with a great question in them. And now there rises in her eyes a smile of subtle irony.

Because I do not inquire, she explains in her deep voice, she is compelled to speak for herself. Why does one come to a famous author?

Naturally, she has for a long time desired to know me, but without a special reason she would never have dared to come. Now, however, she comes as to a doctor or a lawyer, on a professional visit, for an opinion and for counsel. She has written something and wishes to enjoy the criticism of an authority. Will I not take the trouble?

I reply politely, very politely: "Certainly, with the greatest of pleasure."

She laughs. Oh, she does not believe that her piece will afford me much pleasure. The very handwriting is impossible. Should I prefer, perhaps, to have her read it to me?

I desire to hear the sound of her voice. But if she reads she will look at the manuscript during the entire reading, and I'll be unable to see her eyes.

Then she adds, "But I read very badly. My reading is even worse than my handwriting." She laughs: she does not care to read, either. For if she reads it now, I'll express my opinion at once, and she will have to arise, say "Good

day," and never call again. She would rather leave the manuscript with me, and then she will come,—yes, she will really *come* and hear the answer. She does not wish it by mail. She will certainly have a number of questions to ask. She would prefer to come,—and since, naturally, I shall not have read her manuscript through, she will have to call again and again. . . .

She deposits upon my desk a small manuscript. For the first time I see her hand. A wee little hand,—white, tender skin, through which the lines of the joints are visible.

I take the manuscript, glance at the title-page, peep at the beginning and at the middle, and feel her deep black eyes upon me. And as I raise my head I encounter her glances with the great question in them, and also the subtle irony.

Something taps at my window. And now it miaows. I know that a cat has taken refuge upon my window-sill from the endless down-pour. I am certain of it, yet I arise from my

chair and walk over to take a look. This furnishes some distraction from my thoughts. And an excuse for moving. My feet are like ice.

I raise the shade and shudder with fright. A large black cat is looking up at me from the outer darkness, with her burning, phosphorescent eyes. I hate a black cat. Not that I am superstitious, yet in my memory and my nerves there is a residue of everything that superstition has created concerning black cats. I rap at the window to drive her away. But she pays little heed to my rapping. She turns around, selects a comfortable spot and lies down. I am on the point of opening the window and thrusting her into the street below, but I don't care to touch her. I take pity on her, too. Outside the rain is still falling, falling. Let her lie and rest on a dry spot. Who cares?

I lower the shade and return to my writing table.

Just a moment to banish the black cat from my mind, and I'll pursue my thoughts anew.

Now then—of my fortune and misfortune. But did I not previously think: *or* my misfortune?

I answered her, Yes. She could leave the manuscript with me. I would read it over,—read it over very carefully, and tell her my opinion.

The whole truth?

Of course.

When would she come for the answer?

I'd tell her a few days later.

Why a few days later? Why not to-morrow? She would come to-morrow. The piece was such a short one. One could read it in less than half an hour.

So I yield to her. Very well. Let her come to-morrow.

My wife has meanwhile entered the room. I introduce her. My wife is affable and smiles, but *she* is sullen, curt and unbending.

She arises from her place. Now she will leave.

My wife laughs. "Am I driving you away?"

She, somewhat aloof, replies, No. She has simply been sitting long enough.

And on the threshold she asks, insinuatingly, "You will read my manuscript personally?"

For a second I am strongly impelled to return her manuscript, thus wreaking vengeance upon her for my wife.

But she has already closed the door and is gone, without having waited for a reply. Perhaps she had noticed the spark of displeasure that shone in my eyes.

"What sort of impudent cat is that?" asks my wife.

I burst into laughter.

The next day she did not come. Nor the day after. But on both days I *thought* that she had not come. I did not wish to give the matter thought, but it haunted me, made me uneasy. If she had promised to come, she should have kept her word.

I read her manuscript. A very wretched tale. It was supposed to depict the yearning

of a solitary woman for an unknown man. But the words were weak and the colours false. And I could not get away from the idea that perhaps she had written them just to have a pretext for coming to me. "The impudent cat!"

On the third day she came. From the door she laughed to me with her deep, staccato laughter. "Kept you waiting?"

"Catch me telling you, you cat!"

I bid her enter the room. She advances to the centre, looks about, gazes toward the door by which my wife entered three days before, directs her deep look upon me, taking a chair, and speaks with her deep, velvety voice. "Have you read through my manuscript?"

I am about to tell her the truth, but I feel that I cannot dismiss her from me forever,—that I desire her to come to me again,—so I reply, "I've read it, but not read it through. You will have to forgive me."

✱ "Where did you leave off?"

Yes, where am I to tell her I left off?

"Perhaps you haven't even started to read it

yet?" she suggests, seeing that no answer to her previous question is forthcoming.

I assure her that I really have read her tale, commencing to relate the contents, and betraying myself by disclosing a knowledge of the end.

"Then you've read it all!" she laughs.

"Yes," I confess. "But only superficially,— I merely thumbed the pages."

And she, with her deep voice, declares, "Oh, my little story isn't so deep that it requires a second reading. You may tell me your opinion. I will not cry if my little piece is valueless. I know myself that its worth is very small. And as to my coming to you again, you needn't worry. I have brought another manuscript that I wrote in the past two days."

Heavens, what is that? Fie! What a scare I got!

The black cat has sprung into the room.

I look at her in terror. And only gradually does my astonishment master my fear. How

did she jump in? For the window is closed!

I go over to the window. The cat presses close to the wall underneath and gazes up at me, as if entreating me not to cast her out. I raise the shade. I examine the window. It is shut and fastened. I examine the panes. Ah, yes, down in the left-hand corner a small opening has been broken through. A small opening, forming together with the frame a triangle. And the glass bordering the hole glitters with many sharp, uneven, jagged edges.

When was the pane broken? How have I failed to notice it sooner? Why has nobody in the house noticed it?

And how has the cat crawled through? That large black cat through such a small aperture? She must have scratched her entire skin. I turn to look at her and am seized with murderous rage. I am about to kick her, and resolve to throw her back into the rain and the darkness. If only for the sake of the yellow canary that I have in a brass cage in another room. But I myself do not wish to do this. I don't care to

touch the wet cat, and I feel sure that I'll stain my fingers with blood.

I summon the housemaid and order her to throw out the cat. She does not ask how the cat got in. She is certain that some one let the animal in and would like to know who could have been so careless. Her first thought and chief concern is the yellow songbird of whom the entire household is so fond. She seizes the cat and dashes out with it. She opens the street-door and throws the animal out with a curse. I wish to learn whether her hands are smeared with blood, but she does not reappear. She has gone back to her work. I am content. For a long conversation would have ensued, and I desire to be alone and undisturbed. I'll find out later.

To resume.

She sat and spoke for a long time. She also arose from her place and approached me, so close that I could feel her breath and an odour of new-mown hay enveloped me; a warmth radi-

ated from her, making me uncomfortably warm. Several times she placed her hand upon my hair,—my hair that was more grey than black—the impudent cat! How dare she! Suppose my wife should happen to come in and surprise us.

She noticed my furtive glances toward the door and laughed. She had seen my wife leave the house, she asserted. With a young girl. Was that my daughter? As she spoke she caressed my grey hair and looked at me with those deep eyes full of endearment and desire. And she added, with her velvety, resonant voice, "I detest authors' wives!"

And then: "An artist should not be married. He should be free—for all and each. . . ."

I maintained a significant silence. What should I say to her? I must be careful with this woman.

She took my hand and examined my fingers. She held them long and tenderly, fondling them with her own thin, warm fingers.

Then I had to discourse to her about my cre-

ative work, and the touch of her fingers was immensely pleasant, and I spoke with increasing warmth and friendliness, so that she might not release my hands.

All at once she leaned forward and kissed me upon the lips, as I was in the middle of a sentence,—in the very middle of a word.

Like a flash she disappeared from the room.

The cat! The cat has again sprung into the room. Naturally, through the same opening in the window-pane. I scold and curse. But this time I'll not summon the maid. I open the window, seize the cat by the neck and throw her into the street with all my might. I do not see her fall, but I hear her strike the stony pavement far off somewhere. There, now she will hesitate long before she'll come. That is, if she is able to move at all.

I close the window and sigh with relief. But that hole must be stuffed. If it were not for the inclemency of the weather and the lateness of the hour, I would send for the glazier. But

for the present it must be stuffed with something. I hunt about, find a newspaper and stop the hole.

Now I may calmly give myself once more over to my thoughts.

A kiss. A bound. Vanished——

She came the following day. With her deep eyes, her deep voice and her singing youth.

I feared her coming; I tried to hope that she would not come. No sooner had I caught sight of her than my heart began to pound excitedly.

She had again arrived just after my wife had left the house. Had she watched for her to leave? How long had she been lurking outside? I asked her and she laughed.

Oh, what was the difference! She had waited much longer before coming to me for the first time. The thought of using the manuscript as a pretext had been slow to suggest itself to her.

But—wouldn't I prefer to come to her? She had her own room. She might receive any one she pleased; she was perfectly free.

She said all this so simply. So sweetly, so innocently, so naturally,—with that deep velvety voice of hers, and her fathomless eyes and her intense youth.

I wanted to cry out, No! I felt with all my being that I should say No. But at the same time I knew that the struggle was in vain.

She had ignited something within me, and I was all aflame,—burning, burning.

She seized me in an embrace and pressed upon my lips a long, passionate kiss. Within me, my being shouted, sang and exulted.

I was young again! Young again! How we both rejoiced!

To-morrow I am supposed to visit her. Until to-day I longed for to-morrow to arrive. And now I am afraid of it. To-day I do not desire it. I tremble lest I go to her after all. Whither will this lead? Who is she? What is she? Why has she singled *me* out? I have grey hairs already and a grown-up daughter almost her age.

Isn't that the rustle of the paper with which I stuffed the broken pane?

Yes. Somebody's clawing and tearing at it.

Or perhaps it's the black cat again! I jump to my feet and run to the window. Yes. The black cat has pulled out the paper and has already thrust her head in through the opening.

No! This time you shall not crawl in! I place my hand upon her head and press, press with all my strength. Oh, surely I'll crush the feline life out of her! . . .

Yet. . . . Yet. . . . How strong she is! . . . She plants herself firmly upon her forepaws and gradually thrusts herself backwards through the opening and from under my hand. And now she already has her forepaws on the outer side of the window. . . . I am seized with terror. . . . Hot and cold chills pass through me. . . . I begin to call for help. . . .

Fie, what an evil dream! How my heart throbs! I go to the window. Outside it is still raining; the night is black, and on the window

ledge lies the black cat, peacefully coiled into a ball.

I place my hot forehead against the cool window-pane and am consumed by a passionate wish. May the *other one*, too, be only an evil dream! And I shudder.

Oh! Oh!

To-morrow—to-morrow—to-morrow! . . .

A TALE OF A HUNGRY MAN

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ITSYE had for two days in succession had nothing in his mouth; in other words, he had been hungering. But on the third day, for three brass buttons he wheedled the lunch out of a little Hebrew school pupil that studied in the school of his yard—two little buttered cakes—and swallowed them eagerly. Then he became angry. The cakes were a mere morsel to him, but now he had at least a little strength with which to feel anger, and was seized with an impulse to accomplish evil. His fingers itched with the desire. First of all he launched a wicked kick in the direction of Zhutshke, the little dog which the landlady of his house held dearer than her own children. Zhutshke ran off yelping with pain, but this was not enough for Itsyé. He tore up a stone that had been frozen to the earth and with all his strength

sent it flying after the dog. It did not strike the animal, however, but landed on the door of Simkin the lawyer's house. It struck with a resounding blow, and Itsye felt satisfied, for he wouldn't have cared had the stone struck Simkin or Simkin's wife on the head.

But with all this his hunger was not appeased in the slightest, nor was his seething heart calmed in the smallest degree. He waxed still angrier, for he felt that these were mere trifles, that he had accomplished nothing with them. He walked through the gate, glanced up and down the street, and felt that he was an enemy to every passer-by, and especially to every one that rode. He cursed them with bitter oaths and would gladly, with his own hands, have executed all tortures upon them.

Another little pupil approached the gate; he was wrapped in a broad scarf and wore the large shoes of a grown-up person. He held his hands inside the scarf, and either because he was indifferent or because it was too cold, he did not remove them to wipe his nose, from

which mucus leaked down to his mouth.

Out of his pocket peeped a crust of bread. Itsye was seized with a longing for it, but the appearance of the poor child restrained him. He sought, however, to convince himself that he was incensed against the child, even as he was against the whole world, and that he ought to give him a hard kick, as he had just done to Zhutshke. He seized the child by the nose, then struck him on the cap and scowled, "Slob, it's running into your mouth!" The child was frightened, brought his elbow up to his nose and ran off. But soon he turned back, looked at his unexpected enemy and began to cry, "Wicked Itsye! Itsye the bad man!" And he disappeared through the gate. Itsye did not even deign to lok at him.

He leaned against the gate. Why? He did not himself know. At any rate, he was weary. Angry and exhausted. The two cakes had only excited him. Food, food! He could see before his eyes the piece of bread in the poor boy's torn pocket. That would have come in very

handy. He was sorry that he hadn't taken it away. A whole big piece of bread——

He leaned more heavily against the gate, not knowing why and not knowing what was to come or what would result from his standing there. The cold grew intense, but Itsye did not feel it, for he was angry and paid no attention to it. Besides, he had no place of refuge. Up there in his garret it was still colder. Moreover, there was nobody there, and he would have none upon whom to vent his wrath.

He stood thinking of nothing. It was impossible for him to think. He no longer knew precisely that he was in a rage; it seemed to him that to-day he would work a very clever piece of malice. He knew nothing about dynamite; otherwise he would have thought unceasingly of bombs, and would have painted himself pictures of the whole city, the whole country, the world itself, being blown by him into atoms. But he gave no thought to any definite project. He was certain that he would do something malicious enough. He felt it.

Two labourers passed by and were conversing about hunting for work. It flashed through his head that he would stop looking for work even if the employers starved to death! At the same time he felt that his seeking was all in vain. He would find no work to-day, any more than yesterday, or the day before, or the day before that, or the whole twenty-seven days in which he had been searching for employment.

In his mind's eye he could see "to-morrow,"—a dragging, cloudy day, on which he would be faint with hunger. But he did not care to think of to-morrow. Only "to-day." . . . To-day he must accomplish something; then he would know what would come to-morrow, the day after, and all the other days. Wherefore he remained leaning against the gate and looked into the street with a cutting smile upon his pale lips and in his dull, weary eyes, without the trace of a thought in his head. He even ceased scolding and cursing.

All at once he tore himself away from the

gate and began to walk. He paid no attention to whither he went. He lost his bearings, unknown to himself. He strode on, not knowing that he was moving. His feet were like logs and he could scarcely lift them. He became soon aware that he was no longer at the gate, and that he was wandering about the street. Then it seemed to him that he had wished and resolved to take a little walk, only he could not recall when he had thought of it. It was good that he would now have a little exercise. His feet must get warm. But he affected not to be troubled about his feet any more than about the cold itself, which pierced him to the very marrow.

He walked along slowly, cautiously, calmly. The street on which he was led at one end to the city-market and at the other to the municipal garden. He had no idea of whither he was headed, but the nearer he approached to the market the shriller and clearer became the noises from that vicinity. Then he realised the direction in which his feet were taking him, and

again it seemed to him that this was exactly what he had desired and determined upon. This was the very spot for him to execute his plan of vengeance. He stopped on the curb.

The great market-place seethed with shouting, gesticulating persons. The air resounded with the din of thousands of human beings. The clamorous despair of the wretched poor, the grunting indifference of the sated rich, the screeching impudence of the money-hungry,—all mingled here and rose above the heads of the multitude, deafening the ears of the unaccustomed spectator. About Itsye all manner of individuals were walking, hurrying, scampering, with and without bundles. Almost every passer-by touched him, jostled against him, but he stood there calm, motionless. It occurred to him that this in itself was good,—that in this manner alone he was doing harm. Yes, he must continue to stand here and obstruct everybody's passage! His eyes, however, darted about the square, as if seeking there just what form his vindictive ire should assume. They rested upon

the bread-shops and the bank-stalls, laden with "Korah's wealth." And he began to contemplate how it would be if he made off with a packet of bank-notes——

A porter with a large case on his shoulders bumped against him, nearly pushing him over. He felt an intense pain in his back and came to himself. He turned red with anger.

"You plague, you! Where are your eyes?"

The porter mumbled something from under his burden and continued on his way with heavy steps.

Itsye, however, felt the pain and rubbed his back.

"I'll bury you together with the case, you piece of carrion-meat!"

The porter craned his neck from under his case and looked back at the shouting man. Itsye's appearance called forth little deference from the toiler; he stopped for a moment and eyed his opponent with scorn.

"Hold your mouth, or I'll stop it for you so that you'll be dumb forever. I'll show you

what 'carrion-meat' means, you bloody dog!"

The porter went on his way, grumbling and cursing. Itsye muttered a few imprecations and turned his head in another direction.

"What have you planted yourself here for, in everybody's way?" he heard a surly voice exclaim behind him.

He looked around. Kaplan, the shopkeeper, was standing in the doorway of his shop, eyeing him angrily. He replied coarsely:

"What worry is that of yours?"

Kaplan grew excited.

"I'll soon show you what worry of mine it is!" And he sent the errand-boy after a policeman.

As he ran by Itsye the boy jeered, with mischievous eyes, "Just wait a moment! You'll soon have a good drubbing!"

Itsye spitefully refused to move. To hell with everybody!

Now then. What was it he had been thinking of before? And his glances began to wander across the square and the faces of the

people, as he tried to recall his previous thoughts. When he noticed the boy returning with a policeman he turned his head indifferently aside.

"What are you standing here for? Move on! Off with you!" commanded the guardian of order.

Itsye slowly faced about.

"Is this spot private property, what?"

"Move on, I tell you!"

Itsye resumed his former position.

"Move on!"

The official was now in an ugly mood and had raised his sabre.

Itsye felt that he must refuse to stir. But something moved his feet. It was the instinct that a policeman must be obeyed.

He went off. Back to his street. Slowly, scarcely moving his legs, without looking back at the official.

He was frozen through and through. It was as if he had no feet. As he approached the gate to his house he felt that it would be

pleasant to lie down a while. This he felt against his will. He must remain in the street because he was filled with rage and must vent it in some vindictive deed. But his heavy, frozen limbs drew him to his attic, where it was frightfully cold, where the icy wind moaned and whistled. The wind was not so noisy here below. It seemed that his feet knew he would hunt up all sorts of old rags and wrap them around his frozen members.

So he allowed his feet to carry him along. On the way to the garret they overturned a slop-pail and stumbled across a cat. It was they, too, who opened the door of his room. The door flew back and struck against something soft. The soft object fell, and the feet had to step over a heap of tatters out of which looked the parchment-yellow, wrinkled, peaked face of an old shrivelled-up woman.

"Wow—wow—wow!" she began to wail, hopelessly enmeshed in her rags. It was the deaf-and-dumb landlady of his lodgings.

He made no reply. The feet were already in bed.

He slept for a long time. It was already dark when the feet slipped down from the bed. At once he recollected that he was angry, and felt his ire course through him. But he was weary and weak. So weak, in fact, that he decided not to get up, but rather to lie there forever. "A piece of bread!" flitted through his mind. He could behold rows of well-provided houses, countless kitchens, heaps of bread-loaves. But he continued to lie there, because he did not know,—could not begin to know, how to get to them.

At last an idea flashed upon him. "From the deaf-and-dumb old witch!"

He arose from the three-legged bed and walked into the landlady's room. The bundle of rags was seated at the table, before a small night-lamp that lacked a chimney, eating from a pot of water containing crumbled bits of hard bread.

He approached the bundle of rags and indicated with his fingers that he was very hungry and wished a piece of bread. She clutched the pot more tightly and began to bark savagely. This meant that she hadn't enough for herself, and that she didn't care to give him anything, anyway, since he had struck her with the door before, throwing her over, and since he wasn't acting properly, not having paid his rouble and a half rent for the past two months.

He knew very well just what her barking signified, and eyed her as if deliberating what course to pursue. Quite cold-bloodedly he wrenched the pot from her grasp, pulled out a piece of bread and crammed it into his mouth. The tattered form seized him, with a frightful, wailing yelp, and drew the pot toward her. He raised it above her reach and continued to chew. The first bite had excited him. He began to eat faster, swallowing almost without chewing. The old woman barked and howled at the top of her voice, pulling at his arms. He thrust her away. She fell upon her knees, grasped his

legs and with a wild gasping and snorting bit into them with her gums, in which stood only two side teeth. He pressed her with his knees to the floor and sat down upon her. She could no longer move.

Now he would eat in peace.

He stuck his fingers into the pot without finding anything. He almost yelled with fury. His heart began to spring within him; his eyes sparkled. He must do something. He sprang to his feet and cried out, wildly, "More bread, old witch!"

He shoved her with his foot, emptied the pot of water on her head and began to look for bread. He found nothing; there was nothing to be found. He continued his search, however. He overturned the old chest, scattered the bedclothes, broke the only chair. He became furious, not knowing what he did. The old woman seized him, dragging him toward the door with terrified shrieks. With all his might he thrust her off. The old woman's head struck against the high oven; she groaned un-

cannily. Her moaning brought him to his senses. He was frightened, and held in his breath. He stepped toward her. Was she still alive? The aged landlady began to arise. He now breathed more freely and dashed out of the room.

He was exhausted, yet excited. He desired to weep,—to weep bitterly. He was thoroughly ashamed of the encounter with the deaf-and-dumb landlady. He had robbed her of her wretched supper and had come near killing her. And his hunger was now greater than ever. “A-a-ah!”

He pressed both his fists to his mouth and began to gnaw at them. The pain grew intense, yet he kept on gnawing. He wished to feel his heart.

The door opened and the old woman appeared. A narrow shaft of light shone over the dark steps, falling like a grey strip upon Itsye's shoulder. But the old woman did not see him, and she sent after the supposedly vanished fellow several infuriated screams, more

cutting than the most devastating curses. Itsye shuddered, stopped chewing his hands and remained motionless, holding in his breath. The landlady returned to her room and locked the door.

"Locked out!" flashed through his mind at once. His head became warm. He tried to consider what was now to be done, but he saw no prospects before him. He felt an impulse to batter down the door, enter the room, get into bed and lie there. He had already rolled his fists into a ball. But after striking the door a resounding blow, he ran down the stairs. Only when he had reached the bottom did he ask himself, "Why that blow?"

It was snowing and a strong wind was whistling and moaning. The cold went right through Itsye's bones; he began to tremble, and his teeth knocked together. He huddled up in his tattered cotton coat, from which there hung patches, strips of lining and wadding. He groaned in despair and stepped back into the entrance of the house. He felt a tug at his

heart, and was once more seized with a desire to weep, to weep.

"What will come of this? What?"

He could behold no answer. He would to-day be frozen to death or die of hunger.

"Oh, for something to eat! Food, food!"

He looked about. He was standing near a cellar, the door to which was protected by a heavy lock. He placed his hand upon the lock, with no thought of robbery. As he felt the cold iron, however, it occurred to him that it would be a good idea to break off the lock and obtain access to the cellar. He pulled at the lock. No. This was beyond his strength. He repeated the attempt, and at length summoned all his force and gave a violent wrench.

The lock merely made a loud noise; nothing else. He was intimidated by the knock. He looked around and quickly deserted the entrance to the house.

Had he really desired to steal? And if he had succeeded in tearing the lock away, would he really have entered and committed theft?

He could not believe this. He had been born into poverty, had been reared as an orphan in misery and ill-treatment, yet his hand had never been raised to another's property. "Scandal-maker," they used to call him, and "wickedest of the wicked"; for he never was silent when wronged, and all were his enemies because of this vindictiveness. Yet these selfsame persons admitted that you could leave heaps of gold with him in perfect security. And just now he had been on the point of stealing! That morning he had also thought of stealing. What? Would he really have stolen? And perhaps yes. Ah, he was so hungry! "Food, food, food!"

Again he surveyed the neighbourhood. He was in the street! He had not even noticed it when he left the yard. What was he going to do in the street? Whither would he go? "Oh, for a bite!" But there was no sense in standing here in the street. He must walk. "Walk wherever my eyes lead me, until I fall—fall, and an end of me!"

Again his wrath returned. Anger against himself and the whole world. At once, however, he saw that he lacked the strength to be angry,—that his heart was growing weaker. “Food, food, food!”

He staggered along, casting glances in every direction and knitting his brows so as to see more clearly through the thickly falling snow. He had no notion of whither he was going, nor was he at all interested. He was moving so as not to remain on the same spot. He peered more intently than ever, although he felt that he would see nothing but large snow-flakes. One thing he knew very well, that he wanted and must have something to eat, even if the world came to an end. “Food, food, food!” he groaned within him desperately.

He reached the municipal garden. The pleasure-spot was situated upon a high hill, at the foot of which flowed the broad, deep river. During the winter there was usually skating on the river, and above, in the garden, a crowd of curious onlookers. But now there was not a

trace of a human being in the garden. Not even the lamps were visible through the thick snow. They illuminated only the space within a few paces of them. Itsye was at a loss whether to feel vexed or not at the absence of people. He did not look back, and continued on his way. He approached the top of the hill and looked down upon the frozen river. He could see nothing. There came to his ears the shrill blows of heavy iron. Moujiks were opening a hole in the ice. And in his weary thoughts he beheld a broad, deep hole down there, and he was drawn thither. The suggestion came to him to hurl himself down from the hill into the deep stream. He would raise no outcry; he would not call for help. He would drown himself quite silently. But he recognised that this was merely a thought; the important thing was that he felt very weak and was ravenously hungry. "Food, food, food!" He looked about, as if he would have liked to see something eatable in the garden. Before him was only the endlessly falling snow. Snow below

him, snow on the bare trees, snow in the air. His legs bent beneath him—now, now he was about to fall. But he did not wish to fall. He desired something to eat, and gathering all his strength he continued his wanderings. Again he moved forward, not knowing whither. He walked along a deserted path, through drifts of snow that fell into his torn shoes,—all alone, the only living creature in the dark, forsaken garden. He could neither hear nor see anything. He moved along because he had nowhere to go, and particularly because he wanted something to eat, eat, eat. He thought of nothing, nor could he think if he tried. Something was driving him on, and he continued on his way with the despairing, inner groan, "Food, food, food! . . ."

He reached the square before the theatre. The bright gleam of the electric lights brought him to his senses. He stopped. As he did so, he came near falling. He stumbled forward and leaned against the wall of a building. He felt that his shoes were filled with snow. This,

however, produced no effect whatever upon him. What did vex him was that he could scarcely stand on his feet, that his heart was fearfully weak and his desire for food persisted in growing. He would remain standing there. Whither else should he go? Here, at least, it was light, and soon he would see people. Many people, —rich, happy. And what of it if he *should* see the wealthy, sated crowd? He would beg alms. He would say that he hadn't eaten for three days.

Ask alms! He shuddered with repulsion at the idea. But he was so terribly hungry! He had been on the point of stealing. Which was better, stealing or begging? He leaned against the wall, threw his head back, looked with a dull glance into the snowy distance and, with his blunted mind, sought a reply.

The night-watchman approached him and pushed him away.

“What are you doing here?”

Itsye scarcely moved. He could not raise his feet.

"Do you want to be arrested?"

Itsye nearly fell; he was greatly excited, but he composed himself and gathered all his strength in a desperate effort to walk off. Ouf! He could not feel his legs. Hunks of ice! He began to kick one foot against the other.

"Well! Get a move on! Faster, there!"

Itsye snarled through his clamped teeth.

"Can't you see I can barely move? What are you driving me for? Better ask whether I'm not hungry!"

He crossed the street. Several stores were still open. Hadn't he better go in and beg alms? He halted before a window. He desired to consider what to do.

"I see you! I see you over there!" he heard the watchman shout.

He proceeded further along the street, at the other end, where it was almost pitch dark. There he paused for a while to kick his feet again. Then he walked along. He made a circle around the theatre and came to a halt before the entrance. There

were no policemen in sight. They were inside the lobby seeking shelter from the wind and storm. Itsye remained there, hopping now on one foot, now on the other. Without any definite thoughts, utterly purposeless. He remained here because it was light, because inside sat wealthy, sated persons enjoying themselves. He recalled that he had never been to a theatre. He had never been able to spare the price. It must be very pleasant inside of a theatre, seeing that people were so enthusiastic about it. Such varieties of entertainment folks devised for themselves! And he must stand outside, covered with snow, frozen, hungry, and would be joyful if he found a piece of bread! His anger began to return. And he recollected that in the morning he had desired to do something, to wreak vengeance. . . . Just what had it been? He wrinkled his forehead. Just what had he meant to do?

"Ah! Much I can think up in there, now!"

He cried this out with an intense self-scorn. He was terrified at the sound of his voice, and

glanced at the large glass doors. Nobody was looking at him; then he had not been heard. Whereupon this talking to himself became pleasant. It afforded distraction. So he commenced to speak. Detached phrases,—fragments of his weary, confused thoughts.

"I'll think up something, pah! . . . With a knife. . . . Or set fire. . . . That's what I ought to. . . . That's something! . . . Let them all roast alive! . . . What am I standing here for? . . . What am I waiting for? . . . They wouldn't give me anything! . . . They'd rather call the police! . . . Kaplan,—may the fires of hell seize him!"

He did not cease his chatter. And the more he spoke, the angrier he grew. He forgot his hunger, he now "felt" his heart. He cursed with imprecations as bitter as death and felt new life course through his veins. He cast all manner of accusations upon the audience inside, eating and drinking its fill and pursuing all manner of pleasures.

"To steal from those people and murder

them is not a bit wrong!" he philosophised. He was now in a mood for anything at all, and would commit in absolute indifference whatever suggested itself. It seemed to him that his strength could cope with any task now,—that it was a giant's strength.

The glass doors swung open. The gendarmes appeared, followed immediately by the crowd. Itsye remained calmly in his place. He did not even cease talking to himself. The gendarmes had not yet noticed him. They were busy with the sleighs. Itsye was therefore able to continue his conversation undisturbed.

"Here they are already!" he said. "They've had a good time and plenty to eat and drink, the dogs! In warm fur coats, arm in arm with their wives, or even with prostitutes. . . ."

A few passers-by eyed the snow-covered individual.

"Drunk or crazy," remarked one of them. They went on their way. Itsye cried after them:

"You're drunk yourself! I'm not drunk, you

curs! I'm hungry, you pimps! I robbed a poor old woman of her supper, you scamps! . . . I, drunk! You curs! . . . I've been hunting work for a month, cholera seize you! Not a bit in my mouth for three days, you dogs! . . ."

A gendarme heard his voice and approached to discover who was shouting and cursing.

"What are you screaming for? Move!"

The officer gave him a violent push.

"What are you shoving about?" cried Itsye and he raised his hand against the officer. He felt that it would be a treat to deliver a slap,—a fiery slap. He waited for one more push.

The gendarme noticed his gesture.

"Ha, you Jewish jaw!"

Itsye's hand descended. The blow resounded loudly. A crowd gathered. Itsye desired to repeat the act. He was now wild. He wished to strike about him, strangle persons, bite. But he received a hard blow upon the head. He grew dizzy and toppled over. Now he could feel feet upon him. He knew that he was

being trampled upon, but he could not open his eyes, nor could he move a limb. Soon he was lifted and dragged somewhere. With blows across the back, the head and the stomach, and with the ugliest oaths. He could not protect himself. He could not even speak. Only rave and groan horribly.

Softer and weaker became the raving and the groaning, and at last he lay quiet, motionless. Dense darkness hovered over him, enveloped him, engulfed him. His eyes were closed, but he felt the darkness. Like a heavy load it pressed down upon him. He knew, in an obscure way, that he had struck somebody and had been beaten up badly in return. And now he was quiet and peaceful, and he wondered at the peaceful feeling. He began to grope about with his hands, his eyes still closed. He struck against a hard, dusty floor. Where could he be? The question flew through his entire being in a most undistinguishable manner. With a great effort he raised his eyebrows. The dense gloom settled upon his open eyes.

He could see nothing and his eyes shut heavily again. Once more he began to scrape about with his hands and opened his eyes. Wider, this time. Something dazzled him. Above, on the ceiling, shone a small grey light. It entered from the single window, which was built in high on the wall. Itsye looked first at the strip of light and then at the little window with the iron bars. He eyed it for a long time. As one who has awaked from a dream and has not yet come to himself.

Suddenly his blood rushed to his head. He sat up quickly. He recognised the bars and now realised that he was in jail. They had given him a good rubbing and had cast him into a dark hole. He became strangely warm. In a moment's time he foresaw everything that awaited him: the blows that were yet in store,—the trial and the sentence,—prison and the prisoners' ward work. He groaned in deep despair. Ah! And now he felt that his head pained excruciatingly; his face and his whole body, likewise. He hastened to feel his head

and his face. His hat was gone. His hair was moist and sticky. He touched an open wound. With his fingers he followed the sticky trail. Blood everywhere. On his head, all over his face and on his bare chest.

He had a desire to weep at his great misery and boundless despair.

"Father!" he wished to cry, and "Mother, dear!" and "God!" Words that he had rarely used; beings he had never known. His heart contracted bitterly and he lay with his face to the floor; his body shook convulsively with his deep lamentation.

For the first time in his life was he weeping so. His was a bitter nature, and as often as life had brought him tears he had been able always to swallow them. He knew that his tears would soften nobody,—that they would only make him ridiculous. They would mock him as a soft-hearted fool; and that must never be. With teeth clenched together this wretched orphan had gone through life in eternal hostil-

ity to all about him. His eyes had been often suffused with blood, but never with tears.

Now, however, he neither could nor desired to hold them back. He wept until the tears refused to come. Then he was overcome by a fainting sensation, and he thought that death was near. It would come to him just as he lay there. He stretched himself out, closed his eyes and waited for death. To lie thus, to fall asleep forever and cease to be. To be liberated once for all from the desolate days behind him and from all the misery ahead.

He yearned for death.

"Ah, to die!"

Before his sight there began to float dead bodies that he had seen during his life. Such he desired now to become. Then he beheld before him the hanging form of water-carrier Kirillo. All at once he sat up. A certain thought had raised him: he, too, would hang himself. This waiting for death would not do. He would not die so soon, if he waited. He peered into the thick darkness and thought. The

impression of his whole life rose before him. Not a single day of happiness; not a moment of rest. Years of unceasing care and of constant struggle, of laborious toil and frequent hunger. And the future threatened still worse. As black as the dense gloom about him. Long years of incarceration, in the prisoners' ranks, and then—hunger once more.

He raised his eyes to the iron bars of the window and felt the thick rope by which his trousers were held in place. Then he looked around and cocked his ear. Was anybody there? He heard no sound. He could scarcely lift himself up. His legs barely sustained him and he was so dizzy. He reached out to the wall and leaned for a moment against it. Then, with soft step, he investigated the room, groping about with hands outstretched. Nobody was there. He had frightened some mice and could hear the patter of their retreating paws. He stopped at the window and stretched his arms upward. He could not reach the bars. In one of the corners, however, there was a

bench, against which he had stumbled as he groped about the cell. With difficulty he dragged it over to the window. The effort so weakened him that he was forced to sit down. Slowly he untied the rope around his trousers. He began to fashion a noose, lapsing into thought as he did so. Once more he looked back upon the wretched past and forward into the dark future. Again he could see not a ray of light neither behind nor before. With teeth tightly clamped he made the knot and cursed life, and his heart seethed with bitter hatred for all humankind. With the self-same noose that he was now making, how gladly would he have encircled the necks of every human being and strangled the whole world. So, and so, and so!

The noose had been ready for a long time, yet he still sat meditating. He cursed and berated humanity, calling down upon it all manner of misfortune. Ah, how gladly he would revenge himself upon them!

Gradually one thing became clear to him. His death in itself would be a good vengeance.

When day should come, and they would prepare to resume their ill-treatment of him, they would find him dead. Ba-a-a! A plague upon all of them! Good-bye, Itsye! No more Itsye! No more Itsye to oppress, to persecute, to abandon to starvation! They would stand before his corpse like whipped curs, crestfallen, and would vent their intense disappointment in a vile oath. Ah, that was a precious thought!

He sprang hastily to his feet, jumped upon the chair, reached to the bars and tied the rope around them. His hands trembled; he shook with fever. He poked his head into the noose and kicked over the bench.

And as the rope tightened he was seized with a desire to laugh. To laugh like a conqueror, like a master. But his eyes began to bulge out, his tongue protruded, and his face turned a pale blue.

But the protruding tongue still mocked.

"Ba-a! Good-bye, Itsye! No more Itsye! . . ."

IN THE STORM

IN THE STORM

A PIOUS woman told it to me as a warning to sinners, to the young, to the moderns.

Black clouds began to fleck the clear sky. Dense, heavy storm-clouds. At first far off, beyond the forest, but very soon they darkened the whole sky over the village. A violent wind lashed and drove them on, and they sped under its whip, angry and sullen, menacing. The wind—a tornado—raged in all the consciousness of its formidable power, raising pillars of dust as high as the driven clouds, tearing off roofs and uprooting trees.

Terror had descended upon the village. Bright day had of a sudden turned to night, such as well befitted the Sabbath of Repentance, the Sabbath before the Day of Atonement. . . . As frightfully dark, as oppressively heavy as a pious Jew's heart.

Folks shut themselves up in their houses, fastening windows and locking doors. The earnest faces of the penitent Jews became still more earnest. The depressing moods of the Sabbath of Repentance waxed still more depressing. God was scolding. The sad voices of the psalm-singers became deeper and more tearful.

The darkness grew blacker and blacker. Then old Chyene raised her eyes from the psalms, looked through her spectacles into the street, uttered "Au-hu!" with trembling heart and heaved a sigh.

For a while she sat gazing outside. She shook her head. Her whole soul was full of God's omnipotence.

It refused to grow lighter. The clouds passed by in endless procession, and the wind howled, whirling thick pillars of dust in its path.

She could recite psalms no longer. She removed her spectacles and placed them between the pages of her thick woman's prayer-book,

rose from her seat and went into her daughter's room.

"What do you say to . . ."

She did not conclude her question. Her daughter was not there.

The old woman surveyed the room, looked into the kitchen, then returned to the room. Her daughter's bonnet was not in its place. With quivering hands she opened the closet. The jacket was missing!

She had gone! And she had warned her daughter, it seemed, not to go out to-day,—that on the Sabbath of Repentance, at least, she might remain at home and not run off to that "Apostate," the former student.

Her aged countenance became as dark as the sky without. And her heart grew as furious as the storm. She gazed about the room as if seeking to vent her rage,—strike somebody, break something.

"Oh, may she no longer be a daughter of mine!" escaped in angry outburst from her

storming bosom, and she raised her hand to heaven.

She was not affrighted by the curse that her lips had uttered on this solemn Sabbath. At this moment she could curse and shriek the bitterest words. She could have seized her now by the hair, and slapped her face ruthlessly.

Suddenly she threw a shawl over her head and dashed out of the house.

She would hunt them both out and would visit an evil end upon both of them.

A flash of lightning rent the clouds, and was followed by reverberating thunder. Then flash upon flash of lightning and crash upon crash of thunder. One more blinding than the other, one louder than the other!

The horror of the population grew greater. That it should thunder on the Sabbath of Repentance, and in such demoniac fashion! All hearts were touched, all souls went out in prayer.

Old Chyene, however, scarcely noticed this.

The wind blinded her eyes with dust, tore her

scarf from her, blew her skirts about, twisted the wig on her old head.

She rushed along oblivious to all.

She neither heard nor saw anything before her. Within her it thundered and raged, it stormed and something drove her on. And before her all was dark, for her eyes were shot with blood.

Her small form grew even smaller. She strode along fairly doubled up, hastening breathlessly. She seemed to go faster than the wind. The wind lagged behind her. And whenever it caught up with her, it only spurred her on, and she quickened her step.

She did not look around, did not remark the inquisitive eyes that peered at her from behind the fastened windows by which she ran. She neither saw nor heard anything. Her entire being was merged with the fury of nature. Her thought was a curse, a horrible curse, a deadly curse. Not in words. But in her whole soul. Within her it cried, it thundered,—drowning out the thunder of the black, angry clouds.

She stormed into the "apostate's" house. She opened the door with a loud bang and closed it with one even louder. Those in the room shuddered at the sudden intrusion and jumped to their feet. She cast a wild, hostile glance at them and dashed through the rooms, from one to the other, from the other to a third. She tore the doors open and slammed them behind her, accompanied by the thunder, as if in a wager as to which of them would make the panes and the windows rattle more violently. A little child took fright and began to cry. She ran from room to room, but neither he nor her daughter was there.

Then she flew back. On the threshold, however, she paused for a moment. She rolled her eyes heavenward and raised her arms to God.

"May flames devour this house!" came from her in a hoarse voice.

Then she departed, pulling the street-door violently and leaving it open. The household stood agape, as if the storm itself had torn into

the home. Out of sheer stupefaction the persons forgot to close their mouths.

Out of the clouds poured a drenching rain mixed with hail. The tempest seethed like a cauldron.

This boiling tempest, however, raged in Chyene's bosom. Something stormed furiously within her. She no longer felt the ground beneath her. The flood soaked her through and through, but this could not restrain her. It served only to augment her savage mood.

She ran from house to house, wherever she might have expected to come upon her daughter and the "apostate." She stopped nowhere, uttered never a word, but dashed in and then sped out like a flash of lightning, leaving the household open-mouthed with astonishment.

She should find them! Even under the ground. And she did not cease her cursing and her maledictions.

As she rushed from the last house she paused for a moment. Whither now?

She turned homeward. Her heart told her

that her daughter was now at home. Her lips muttered the most terrible imprecations, and the inner fury was at its height; the very air, it seemed to her, was laden with her cries, with her curses and oaths.

With a strong gust of wind, a flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, she tore into her home.

Her daughter was not there.

She sank upon a chair and burst into wailing.

There was a terrifying crash of thunder. One of those thunderclaps that work the most widespread havoc. Nature seemed to be shaking off the entire residue of energy that had been left to her by the hot summer.

The inhabitants of the village were rooted to the spot in terror. They looked about, then ventured a glance outside. Hadn't some misfortune occurred? The penitents buried their faces deeper than ever in their prayer-books, and more than ever their voices quivered.

Chyene, however, had apparently not heard the thunder. She continued to wail, to wail bit-

terly. Then a wild cry issued from her throat, as wild as the thunder:

"May she not live to come home! May they bring her to me dead! Oh, Lord of the universe!"

The clouds replied with a clap of thunder and the wind sped apace, shrieking.

Suddenly she arose and dashed out as before. The wind accompanied her. Now it thrust her forward from behind, now it ran ahead like a faithful dog, smiting all in its path, raising the dirt from the road and mixing it with the thick drops that fell from the clouds, which were still black, and with the seething drops that coursed from her burning eyes.

She was running to the road just beyond the village.

They had surely gone for a walk on the road, where they had been seen several times. She would meet them on the way, or in Jonah's inn near the big forest.

On the Gentile's lane, the last one of the village, the dogs in the yards heard her hastening

steps upon the drenched earth. Some of them began to bark behind the gates, not caring to venture out into the rain; others were not so lazy and crawled out from under the gates with an angry yelping. She neither saw nor heard them, however. She only gazed far out over the road, which began at the lane, and ran along.

One dog seized her skirt, which had become heavy with the water. She did not heed this, and dragged the animal along for part of the way, until it tired of keeping pace with her in the pelting downpour. So it released her skirt. For a moment it thought of seizing her in some other spot, but at once, with a sullen growl, it set out for its yard.

On the road the wind became still stronger. And the thunder re-echoed here with thousands of reverberations from the neighbouring forest. Chyene looked only straight before her, into the distance, through the dense, water-laden atmosphere.

The way was strewn with heaps of twigs and

branches that had been severed by the lightning, and even a few trees lay before her, torn up from their very roots, and charred.

"Would to God that the thunder would strike *them* even so!" she muttered.

She was consumed by an inner cry. Now she had found a definite form for all her curses. The thunder up yonder had torn it from her.

And she ran on, on. . . .

But what is this here?

A few paces before her lie two persons. A man and a woman. With contorted visages. In writhing positions. Their faces black as earth, their eyes rolled back. Two corpses, struck by lightning.

There was a brilliant flash, followed by a deafening thunderclap.

She recognised her daughter.

More by her clothes than by her charred countenance; more by her entire figure than by the horribly staring whites of her eyes.

The girl's arm lay beneath that of the young

man. The top of the open umbrella in the youth's hand had been burned off.

The old woman was on the point of shrieking a curse, of adding her thunder to the fury of the storm's thunder; her eyes flashed together with the lightning; in her heart there arose a devastating tempest.

She wished to cry out the most evil of words,—that the dead maiden had earned her end. She desired to send after her the most wretched and degrading of names.

Suddenly, however, all grew black before her. A flood of molten lead seemed to pour into her head. Weariness and trembling fell upon her. Her garments, saturated with the rain, seemed to drag her to the earth. Her eyes were extinguished.

The thunder and lightning and shrieking of the wind broke out anew.

But within the old woman all was quiet, dark, dead. She sank to her knees before the corpse of her daughter, stretched over the body her

trembling arms, and a dull flame flickered up in her eyes.

Her entire being quivered. Her teeth knocked together. And with a hoarse, toneless voice she gasped:

“My darling daughter! Henny, my darling!”

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